

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 8 May 2008

Session 3

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 8 May 2008

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

### Housing Needs

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Good morning. The first item of business is a Labour Party debate on motion S3M-1848, in the name of Johann Lamont, on meeting Scotland's housing needs.

09:15

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** As ever, it is a privilege for me to open the debate on behalf of the Labour Party. It follows on from last week's woeful performance by members on the Government front and back benches. That housing debate was marked by their refusal to answer any of the key questions or to give any indication that they had any awareness of the range and importance of the issues that need to be addressed. [*Laughter.*] If the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change finds that amusing, I suspect that he will not find anybody from the housing sector to join him.

The lack of time for that previous debate allowed ministers to equivocate. It was evident to us that the Government was unwilling to address the issues. It would not even provide any time to debate the matter, despite the empty, stretching prairie of time—peppered by stopgap debates and marginal issues—that forms the Government's business programme.

We have had three Government debates or statements on housing. On 21 June 2007, the announcement of the housing supply task force came with a huge fanfare, only for us to discover later that the body will not report; that it was not being consulted on the budget; that, remarkably, it would not even shape planning policy, which is designed to address the relationship between planning and the provision of affordable housing; and that it was not being consulted on the revision of Scottish planning policy 3.

On 26 September 2007, a debate on the Glasgow Housing Association was initiated and important issues about the inspection report were addressed. The Government indicated that it would progress second-stage transfer. Nicola Sturgeon said that ministers would

"review the current suite of grant agreements that are in place".—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2007; c 2089.]

Will the minister say, in summing up, when we will get a report on that?

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** Will Johann Lamont join me in welcoming the fact that, after one year of this Scottish National Party Government, there has been more progress towards second-stage transfer than there was during the entire time when she was housing minister?

**Johann Lamont:** I hope that the cabinet secretary does not live to regret that. The issue is really difficult.

I do not support the SNP amendment—although I will be interested to hear the Minister for Communities and Sport speak to it—but I welcome its commitment to scrutinise the Mazars report using an independent process. I urge that that should be done by people with expertise in valuation and adjudication in order for confidence to be restored. I am delighted that rent-a-quote Alex Neil's notion of a black hole is refuted by the report. It is incumbent on ministers to ensure that such issues are scrutinised properly.

On 31 October 2007, we had the spectacle of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing being refused the option of sharing with the Parliament her approach on "Firm Foundations" because, unhappily, she had already shared it with the press. That has been the Government's approach in a nutshell. It overclaims and underdelivers; it seeks headlines rather than solutions; and, rather than engaging in consensus building on the big issues, it settles for either silence or playing games.

It is impossible for me to cover the huge number of issues that have been raised, but I will touch on some that I think are significant. I thank all those people who have taken the time to treat the debate on this subject sufficiently seriously and to provide us with briefings, particularly on the issues around the specialist provision of housing, which I believe merit a debate on their own.

The motion seeks to capture the challenge of any strategy on housing. Indeed, it could have included more on energy efficiency and building standards. For me, however, the key lesson that even laying out those issues confirms is that, although housing policy must be about bricks and mortar, it cannot only be about that. That is why many people are anxious about the Government's approach. In effect, the Government has boiled down its aspirations to building 35,000 houses without thinking through the range of needs that must be met, with no target for social renting and not even a commitment to build as many homes as we did in the past eight years; with no thought on how to sustain that investment by putting in

place and supporting community regeneration; with nothing to say about meeting housing need in a way that goes beyond the house itself—with support for the elderly in the community, for people leaving care, and for those who wish to move on from women's refuges; and with nothing to say about funding decisions, which creates uncertainty at best for those who wish to support, for example, adults with learning disabilities to live independently.

Our history tells us that, although national house building programmes might provide houses, they do not necessarily do the rest. How will the Government support the delivery of the homelessness target? How will it protect programmes to prevent homelessness? What expectations does the Minister for Communities and Sport have of the single outcome agreements? Are there any compulsory elements in meeting special and particular housing needs and in supporting progress towards the homelessness target? How will the Government act if there is evidence that supported accommodation, such as that for adults with disabilities, has to end because of the end of ring fencing for supporting people?

**Members:** Oh!

**Johann Lamont:** I only ask the question. The minister has said in the past that, if there were problems, we could always resume ring fencing. How is that being monitored? What action will he take?

We understand the pressure to support first-time buyers, although we are no clearer about what support will be available. What does the minister have to say not just about new build, but about the raising of standards through the Scottish housing quality standard? What does he have to say about the need to support people who might face repossession and about emphasising the target for social rent? What does he have to say about programmes such as ours that were introduced for mortgage to rent? How will the Government support councils with high levels of debt, which will not be able to take advantage of their tiny share of the tiny £25 million for council house building?

The figure for the money that is being released through stock transfer to housing associations is staggering. The GHA's investment programme for 2006-07 was £137 million, which is about one third of the total affordable investment programme that the SNP projects for the whole of Scotland for the year ahead. The provision of GHA new build—6,000 new homes over the next five years—makes a stark comparison with Ms Sturgeon's announcement, which would mean at most 50 houses for Glasgow in the next five years.

**Members:** In addition.

**Johann Lamont:** The money is top-sliced off housing association grant, so it is not additional.

It takes a particular kind of cowardice and recklessness for people to encourage others to vote against their own interests when they do not have to live with the consequences. That is compounded by a Government that refuses to accept its responsibility to find solutions. For the absence of doubt, the Stewart Maxwell solution is to raise rents, sell off assets and seek efficiencies, which could be the very expenditure that protects effective housing management.

I urge the minister to look to his Cabinet colleague John Swinney for guidance on how he should fulfil his responsibilities. John Swinney, in discussing his decision to be pragmatic in relation to the collection of rates in the context of local loop unbundling—members really do not want to know the detail—said that ministers were operating within a framework in which the Government was constrained in the policy areas that it was able to take forward. He explained that his pragmatism was justified, because the Government's priority is to maximise the resources that are available to local authorities for delivering front-line services. How much pragmatism should we expect from the Government in acting creatively to access the funding that stock transfer would deliver, when the only other option on offer to tenants is a shrug of the ministerial shoulders?

The Government's only big idea, "Firm Foundations", is significantly flawed, and the objections to it—as argued by a range of organisations—are not so easily silenced as by deleting part of a parliamentary motion. I urge the minister not to dig himself into a trench on the issue. There are genuine anxieties that the only real outcome of his approach will be to bring to an end the very things that made our housing policy so effective. *[Laughter.]* Does that reaction mean that ministers are mocking the housing associations' record? They might be interested to know that. Such an outcome would put at risk the innovative approaches in estate management, the support for tenants and the specialist provision that has been developed by those who need it. It must be an anxiety for the Government that equality groups did not even respond to its consultation.

The problem with "Firm Foundations" is compounded by the consultation document, "Better value from Housing Association Grant". The documents reveal a lack of understanding about effective housing provision going beyond build; they lack evidence on efficiencies; and they are predicated on a process that will squeeze out community-based housing associations to the advantage of the asset-rich big boys. They are also predicated on rent rises, a claim that the

minister has denied in the past, although his own documents indicate that the policy depends on rent increases at the level of the retail prices index plus 1 per cent every year for the next 30 years, and that the private finance factor in development must increase from 18.14 per cent to 21.76 per cent, which is a push to the private market at a time of credit crunch. That is further compounded by the flat-lining of funding on wider action that might support tenants as they go into training or provide money advice, and by the flat-lining of—if not a cut in—community regeneration funding.

It is significant that there was overwhelming support for a national specialist housing function to provide expert support on the range of housing needs. The peremptory decision to abolish Communities Scotland to meet other political commitments seems to have been counterintuitive and against the addressing of housing need.

On “Firm Foundations”, I urge the minister to have the grace to listen to those who understand what needs to be done. On stock transfer, I urge the minister to stop being in denial and instead to be creative in how that money can be released to transform local communities. On meeting homelessness and housing needs, I urge him to take responsibility. The minister should stop outsourcing his responsibilities and tell us what he will do to ensure that the target is met and that the resources are available, not just to ensure supply but to provide the kind of softer-end supports that prevent homelessness in the first place—the kind of things that support people when they come out of care or are in crisis. Above all, I urge the minister to shift from his year-zero approach and to acknowledge the significance of what has already been achieved—not by the previous Executive alone, but by it being willing to work with people in our communities and in the housing sector who understand how one can transform communities and make real change.

I seek support to secure continuing investment in change—rather than settling for the easy headline that will make no difference to the lives of people across Scotland who deserve to have their needs met. That should be part of a serious debate on housing and a broader housing strategy. Last week, we heard the reiteration of marginal, tokenistic—symbolic perhaps for some members—and dishonest claims about what the Government is doing in respect of council housing and right to buy. Now is the time for the Government to take responsibility and work with members throughout the chamber and beyond to develop a proper housing policy that will bring about change rather than simply make headlines.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the broad range of issues that must be tackled in meeting the diverse housing needs

of people across Scotland; confirms that the Scottish Government must act to address these issues, including continued work to prevent and reduce homelessness, the further development of housing to meet particular and specialist need, dealing with the blockages to the supply of housing, providing affordable housing to buy and within the socially rented sector, ensuring higher quality and better managed housing for rent in the private sector, seeking solutions to the problems facing local authorities where tenants voted against stock transfer and recognising the distinctive challenges in rural areas, regeneration areas and areas of high demand; notes that the consultation responses to the *Firm Foundations* document exposed significant flaws in the Scottish Government's approach; urges the Scottish Government to address these flaws and bring forward a coherent strategy for all of Scotland's housing needs and, in particular, agrees that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing should ensure that the Mazars report into second stage transfer issues in Glasgow Housing Association is subject to open, transparent and independent scrutiny.

09:26

**The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell):** The speech that we have just heard typifies why Labour is in the mess it is currently in. It was one long moan that had nothing constructive to say. I welcome the invitation at the end of the speech for us to engage in constructive dialogue. However, after 11 or 12 minutes of nothing but moaning, perhaps Labour members should look to themselves when it comes to constructive dialogue in the chamber.

That said, I am grateful to debate once again the challenge that we face on housing, and the difficult legacy that was left to us by the previous Administration. As the Labour motion states, housing takes in a large number of substantial issues that affect the wellbeing of families and individuals across the country. There is, therefore, much in the motion with which the Government can agree. I regret that the motion's generally constructive tone is marred somewhat by the partisan references to the “Firm Foundations” consultation exercise, which make it impossible for us to support the motion as it stands.

I will return in a moment to the wider challenge that faces housing, but first I wish to say something about the references to GHA and the Mazars report. I welcome the progress on SST that continues to be made. For the first time since the transfer to GHA, there is a realistic prospect of tenant balance within the next 12 months. Whatever else we agree today, I hope that we say or do nothing that will threaten or halt that progress. The Government takes the Mazars report seriously. Ensuring that all tenants are getting a fair deal is crucially important to us. That is why we have asked the Scottish Housing Regulator to provide us with an independent assessment of the report. In the interests of transparency, we intend to publish that assessment by the end of the month.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the minister give way?

**Stewart Maxwell:** No.

I hope that that will help to reassure tenants and other stakeholders that we take the matter and their concerns on it seriously. I am doing everything I can to encourage GHA to discuss the report with the parties to it. I hope that they will strive to reach a common understanding of its findings. That would be the best possible outcome for tenants, as it would enable the progress that has been made with SST to be maintained. Everyone's priority must be to maintain that progress. As our amendment makes clear, the Government stands ready to help GHA and the housing organisations to continue with the transfer process in a manner that serves the interests of all tenants.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** The minister's scrutiny process has been welcomed in the report. What expertise could be provided by Communities Scotland in terms of the regulatory function that he has mentioned? That is a technical issue to do with the valuation differences that are identified in the Mazars report.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Clearly, the independent regulator is the expert in the area. In the past, as part of Communities Scotland, the regulator produced detailed reports on the registered social landlord sector—

**Johann Lamont:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I am responding to a previous intervention. Perhaps you should sit down for a moment and listen.

The fact is that the independent regulator is the independent body to examine those issues. That will be welcomed by people who are interested in the area, particularly in Glasgow. I will publish that information and advice as soon as it is available, and certainly by the end of May.

From the first days in power, the Government has recognised the scale of the challenge facing Scotland's housing system. Last June, in a statement to the Parliament, I described that challenge and drew attention to two particular problems. The first of those problems was the failure over many years to build enough houses across all tenures, which had left thousands of families in temporary accommodation and many more unable to find affordable housing that met their needs. The second problem was the arrangements for subsidising new social housing, which were unsustainable and in desperate need of reform. Those were and are huge challenges, but we moved quickly to address them. After only one month in office, I announced the creation of a housing supply task force to tackle obstacles to

more homes being built in urban and rural areas, such as land supply and planning issues that hamper the delivery of more housing.

In October 2007 we launched "Firm Foundations", which proposed a radical and ambitious package of reforms intended to improve how every part of our housing system operates. At the heart of "Firm Foundations" was our recognition that supply across all tenures must be increased substantially and, on the back of that, our proposal for a step change in the rate of house building from the inadequate rate of 25,000 houses a year to at least 35,000 a year by the middle of the next decade. Set against the backdrop of that reform of the planning system is the action of a Government that is determined to address the recent undersupply of housing, which we must tackle to allow our economy to flourish.

The household projections that are published today, which show increasing numbers of households over the next 25 years, simply underline the vital importance of our housing supply objectives. Crucially, for a Government that is committed to sustainable growth, the ambition to improve supply was cast clearly in terms of all new building being of a higher design and environmental standard.

We have proposed launching a sustainable communities initiative to encourage the development of new sustainable developments that are sympathetic to Scotland's landscape and environment. We recognise the central role of home ownership and the difficulties that face those who wish to buy their own home. At a strategic level, increased housing supply in line with our ambitions will act to improve affordability for house buyers—from those who are entering the market for the first time to families that are moving to meet changing circumstances.

We are committed to providing affordable housing to buy directly through our investment programmes. Our low-cost initiative for first-time buyers does exactly that. Among other initiatives, LIFT includes shared equity schemes that deliver value for taxpayers' money and grants for rural areas, in recognition of the unique circumstances that rural home buyers often face.

At the same time, we took full account of the need for a thriving social sector that can adapt to changing demand and offer more choice to those who cannot afford—or who do not wish—to buy. That included a new and positive role for local authorities as landlords, with a proposal to offer them a financial incentive to build new houses; a proposal to safeguard all new social housing by removing it from the scope of right to buy; proposals for getting better value for our social housing subsidies; and proposals for modernising regulation to ensure that it is more sharply focused

on serving the interests of existing and future tenants.

We envisaged a greater role for the private rented sector—encouraging it to flourish and play a full role in meeting housing needs in urban and rural areas and offering choice and flexibility to those who are in housing need. As “Firm Foundations” made clear, that included improving standards in the private rented sector through measures such as the mandatory private landlord registration scheme, and the new repairing standard. The latest figures show that the Government has achieved a 500 per cent increase in the rate of application approvals for the landlord registration scheme in the past 12 months, with the national approval figure now standing at 75 per cent. That is against an increase of 25 per cent in the number of applications received since last May. “A long-overdue success” was how one commentator in *The Herald* last week hailed the progress that the SNP has made in delivering the scheme.

Last week I launched Landlord Accreditation Scotland, a new company owned by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association and the Scottish Association of Landlords. With start-up funding from the Government, the company will deliver the national voluntary landlord accreditation scheme, which aims to recognise and reward those landlords who are already maintaining their properties to good standards and thus providing tenants with peace of mind.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Stewart Maxwell:** As a whole, “Firm Foundations” constituted a thoroughgoing blueprint for reforming housing policy and making it fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Johann Lamont:** Oh, sit down.

**Stewart Maxwell:** On you go then.

**Johann Lamont:** You are on record as saying that you recognise the role of the housing associations. Do you recognise that it is not partisan to reflect their concerns about the implications of “Firm Foundations” for community-based housing associations?

**The Presiding Officer:** Before the minister answers, I point out that too many members on all sides are using the word “you” when they should not be. As I have said many a time, the only you in here is me.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Clearly, we are negotiating with and consulting the housing association movement through the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. I note that the SFHA’s parliamentary briefing welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to the many proposals

listed and welcomes the fact that we are keen to consult on several others. That sounds to me like we are taking matters forward in the proper way, rather than in the way that Johann Lamont claims.

The claim in the Labour motion that the responses to “Firm Foundations” expose significant flaws in our approach is less than fair and is, indeed, inaccurate. The responses demonstrated a huge measure of support for the thrust of our policies. For example, on housing supply, 230 of the 260 who commented—that is 89 per cent—endorsed the proposal to set a national target to provide 35,000 new houses a year by the middle of the next decade. Our proposals to assist first-time buyers, in particular through new-build shared-equity schemes, were widely supported. Our proposal to end the right to buy on new-build social housing attracted near universal support, with 94 per cent endorsement from those who responded on the issue. Not far behind, the proposal for Government subsidies to build new council houses attracted 81 per cent support. There was also strong support for modernising how social housing is regulated.

I do not want to suggest that support for our proposals was universal or always uncritical or unqualified. Many of the respondents offered comments on the detail of how we might take forward our proposals. We welcome those comments, which are being taken into account in developing the policy. Of course, I would be the first to admit that, in some areas, respondents expressed more serious concerns, on which we will need to reflect carefully, but those various concerns should not be misrepresented as pointing to significant flaws.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** Would it not be appropriate for the minister to give us a flavour of the concerns that were raised by those who responded to the consultation?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The responses to the consultation have been published and are freely available. If Mr McAveety is unable to find them, I can send him the web link so that he can access them. We received encouraging responses across the board. Our proposals were widely welcomed—although that seems to annoy the Opposition—and received huge support right across the sector.

It would be surprising if such a radical and wide-ranging set of proposals did not generate a variety of views. I am delighted that they attracted such a broad measure of support. We intend to build on that support as we rise to the challenge that we all agree exists.

I am encouraged that there is a shared view of the housing problems that we face and, I hope, a shared determination to tackle them. I am also

encouraged by the progress that we have made in dealing with those problems and by the support that we have received for our policies. We look forward to coming back to the Parliament shortly to describe how we will take forward those policies in light of the responses to “Firm Foundations”.

In the meantime, it gives me great pleasure to move amendment S3M-1848.2, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“calls on the Scottish Government to facilitate discussion and mediation between Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) and the relevant local housing organisations to ensure that second stage transfers proceed speedily and equitably in the interests of all tenants and urges the Scottish Government to bring forward a coherent strategy for all of Scotland’s housing needs and, in particular, agrees that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing should ensure that the Mazars report into second stage transfer issues in GHA is subject to open, transparent and independent scrutiny.”

09:37

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Another week, another housing debate. The Scottish Conservatives are always pleased to talk about such a key domestic issue, so we welcome the fact that Labour is using its parliamentary time in this way. We agree with the broad thrust of the Labour motion, although our proposed solutions to the problems might differ from Labour’s and from those that are emerging from the SNP Government.

All members recognise that one of the biggest issues is the need for more affordable housing in communities throughout Scotland, but do ministers realise that the private sector is ready and willing to engage with Government to achieve delivery of affordable homes on the ground? Given the range of practical and innovative ideas and models for increasing the number of such homes, I urge ministers to do more to engage with and co-operate with the private house building sector. The Government has already recognised the role that the private sector can play in providing affordable rented housing through the rural homes for rent scheme, but it must go further and be bolder.

The demand for affordable houses to buy simply will not decrease. As “Firm Foundations” points out, the vast majority of tenants in housing associations aspire to own their own home. The Scottish Conservatives are proud to believe that Government should enable every family that wants to exercise its right to be a home owner to do so.

Proper partnership and engagement with the private sector is the only way in which the Government stands a chance of meeting its target of building 35,000 new homes each year by the middle of the next decade—up from the 23,000 to 24,000 built each year since 2000—yet the

barriers that face the private house building sector are horrendous and are getting worse all the time. One reason for that is that, in this country, the infrastructure providers enjoy a quasi-monopoly status. For mains water and sewerage, there is only one provider—I will give members three guesses as to its name. The situation with electricity is much the same. Therefore, the Scottish Government must ensure that the Water Industry Commission for Scotland and the other regulators do their job by ensuring that such quasi-monopolies do not hold builders and developers to ransom and thereby deprive families of affordable housing or, for that matter, any other kind of housing.

Another quasi-monopoly that is proving a barrier is planning. In the Highlands, I am told, it now takes eight months to get a building warrant. I do not know whether that is because the council has cut down on the number of employees or simply cannot get employees, but I know that such delays are holding up housing developments of all kinds. That must be a very bad thing.

The number of empty properties in Scotland is an issue that I highlighted in last week’s debate, but I make no apology for returning to the subject. Of the 87,000 vacant residential properties in Scotland, 55 per cent are in the private sector and 22,500 of those have been empty for more than six months. That is a massive waste of resources by anybody’s standards. Do ministers agree that the approach that local housing strategies take to empty homes is very patchy? Argyll and Bute Council in my area is taking the lead on developing a local strategy on empty homes and should be commended. All of us want empty properties to be brought back into use. Again, we look to the Government to come up with a firm policy initiative to tackle the problem. We need more delivery and fewer words.

Social housing for rent is, we believe, best delivered by housing associations, which have a track record of positive engagement with their tenants. The SNP’s appeasement of its left-wing supporters by suggesting that councils should once again take the lead in building homes for rent is plain wrong. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has warned that the Government’s proposals on housing association grants will decrease the supply of affordable rented housing and push up existing rents. What is the minister’s response to that extremely worrying claim from one of the key bodies that will be expected to help to deliver the Government’s 35,000 houses per year target? In addition, will the minister confirm whether private bodies will be given the chance to be part of building control?

Last week, my colleague David McLetchie spoke passionately about the benefits of stock transfer,

on which we have also lodged an amendment today as we have such a powerful argument. Audit Scotland's 2006 report "Council housing transfers" rightly stated that tenants benefit from the better service, new investment and greater local control that such transfers deliver. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations—which has a lot of experience through the role that its members have played—has correctly highlighted that stock transfer allows rental income to be spent on higher maintenance standards rather than on repaying historic debt. In addition, the new landlords can successfully access private funding for investment and new development. Given that Scotland's housing debt stands at more than £2.2 billion, the SNP Government simply has no excuses for not encouraging the transfer of council housing stock where tenants wish it. To ignore the pile of money that is on the table from Her Majesty's Treasury would be criminal.

As we said last week, the SNP campaigned along with the Scottish Socialist Party for a no vote on such transfers, but the SNP Government now says that it is neutral. Today's SNP amendment calls on the SNP Government to ensure that second-stage transfer proceeds speedily in the interests of all tenants. If the SNP likes second-stage transfers in Glasgow, what was wrong with first-stage transfers in other areas? In areas where council tenants voted no, there was a failure to explain to tenants why their best interests would be served by stock transfer. Surely the challenge for the Government is to reverse those earlier decisions, which have lost Scotland so much money. There must be a way of doing that. We are certainly investigating possibilities, which we will bring back to the chamber in due course.

Today's debate is welcome. "Firm Foundations" showed up the failings of the SNP Government's approach on housing. The SNP has identified the problems that we face—that is the easy part—but it seems to have no coherent approach on how to face those problems. The Scottish Conservatives recognise that we need a multifaceted approach involving effective planning reform so that houses can be delivered where they are required.

We need to tackle development constraint and to co-operate with the private sector, which has a huge role to play, not least in creating a dynamic rented sector. We need successful shared equity schemes and to bring back into use the tens of thousands of empty properties that exist. We should work through housing associations and transfer social housing stock from local authorities, where tenants vote for it. I hope that this evening members will support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S3M-1848.1, to insert at end:

"regrets the failure of the Scottish Government to actively promote housing stock transfer by local authorities to community-based housing associations, with the approval of tenants, and urges the Scottish Government to co-operate with HM Treasury and councils to achieve the substantial debt write-offs of over £2 billion which are available and thereby facilitate new investment in social housing."

09:45

**Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD):** Opposition members may be forgiven for having a feeling of déjà vu in this debate. After all, did we not debate housing very recently? As has been outlined this morning, just last week the Conservative group brought forward a debate on housing.

However, my feeling of déjà vu comes not because we are debating the same subject two weeks in a row but from the fact that last week the Government failed yet again properly to answer any of the important questions relating to people's fundamental right to good-quality, affordable housing. I wish that I could be confident that the Government will answer our questions this time, but again I have that feeling of déjà vu.

If it were not such a serious subject the Government's responses—especially those of Stewart Maxwell—would be laughable. If members—particularly those on the Government benches—do not believe me, here is a quick history lesson. In last week's debate, Stewart Maxwell stated:

"I will give Johann Lamont an exact figure for the number of houses: it will be exactly a hell of a lot more than six."—[*Official Report*, 1 May 2008; c 8109.]

If that is the minister's idea of exacting, what about this one? On 29 January, I submitted a parliamentary question to the Government asking the minister

"how many affordable homes for rent it will build from 2008 to 2011."

Stewart Maxwell gave a totally inept answer, when he replied that the Government

"expects that the ... budget ... will deliver more new affordable homes ... than planned for 2005-08."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 4 March 2008; S3W-9149.]

I do not know how Mr Salmond—far less Ms Sturgeon—has any confidence left in Mr Maxwell.

The Labour motion that is before us may be a bit detailed, but the Government must demonstrate some knowledge—some understanding—of detail if it is to convince anyone in Scotland that it has a real understanding of the subject. The Liberal Democrat amendment, in my name, seeks further clarification from the Government. It also gives the

Government more time to do the sums that will allow it to give the chamber a detailed answer to my PQ of 29 January.

The Government sets much store by “Firm Foundations”, which would be fine if the document addressed many of the key points relating to housing in Scotland today. Unfortunately, and rather disappointingly, it fails to do so.

I take the example of catering for people with disabilities. Only one small section of the document—barely half a dozen lines on page 15—remotely mentions the subject. Even then, it provides no insight into how elderly and disabled people can be helped to continue to live in their own homes. Inclusion Scotland helpfully points out:

“It can be impossible to take up employment, educational or social and recreational opportunities if you can’t get in and out of your own home or if the living environment is so difficult and hostile that it takes all your time and energy just to do the basics, like bathing, washing and eating”.

Figures from the former Disability Rights Commission indicate that 19 per cent of people in Scotland are disabled and that the figure will rise to 23 per cent by 2025. How can the Government so blatantly ignore more than a fifth of Scottish residents in its key document on the future of housing in Scotland?

There is significant pressure on the social rented housing sector. In some areas, that pressure is so acute that some people will do whatever they can to move up the housing list—even make themselves homeless. The Government and all parties represented in the Parliament are committed to meeting the 2012 homelessness targets. The Parliament is committed to abolishing unintentional homelessness by 2012 and to meeting interim targets in 2009. As Shelter has outlined recently, progress towards meeting the 2009 targets is “patchy”, and most local authorities are well behind where they should be at this stage.

“Firm Foundations” focuses on increasing housing supply and development in the run-up to 2012 as the solution. Although that approach is to be supported, at least in general, unfortunately the paper does not discuss the importance of guarding against managing demand for homelessness services. Although local authorities should continue to do all they can to meet the housing need of individuals in Scotland, more steps must be taken to try to prevent homelessness. For example, more support should be given to tenants to stop them becoming homeless by restoring supporting people funding to an acceptable level, adapting homes to meet people’s needs and conducting mediation between conflicting parties. The drive to reduce the number of homeless people should not be target driven but should be

based on the circumstances of the individuals involved.

In fairness to the Government, I note that there is a much higher level of commitment to energy efficiency throughout “Firm Foundations”. Increased energy efficiency affects existing owners and tenants and both old and new houses; it also helps to safeguard the future of our planet. However, the Government has no clear focus on energy efficiency and how to improve it. It requires a number of spend-to-save investments, including, for existing properties, a greater focus on helping organisations such as Energy Action Scotland to meet the 2016 fuel poverty targets. For new build, the Liberal Democrats are committed from 2010 to having in all properties microgeneration that generates at least one fifth of the building’s energy needs.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the opportunity to debate this subject. We welcome the fact that Labour has put together a detailed motion; we also welcome the Conservative amendment, which is similar to the motion that we supported last week. I hope that members from all parties will accept the additional points that are included in my amendment. More than that, I hope that the Government will accept that the majority of members and groups in the Scottish Parliament are concerned about the Government’s drive and commitment to solving the housing crisis in Scotland. It needs to listen to and learn from the people of Scotland, through their elected representatives. If it fails to do that, I and many others will get that déjà vu feeling again and again.

I move amendment S3M-1848.3, to insert at end:

“regrets that after two parliamentary debates on the subject since the budget was passed, the Scottish Government has still failed to come forward with clear figures on its housing plans across all sector and tenure types including the number of affordable rented houses to be built from 2008 to 2011, and has further failed to produce a clear trajectory for how it intends to meet its commitment to abolish unintentional homelessness by 2012; calls for improved energy efficiency to be a key objective in plans for new housing, and opposes the Scottish Government’s proposals for large scale procurement put forward in *Firm Foundations*.”

**The Presiding Officer:** A number of members who, I am led to believe, wish to take part in the debate have not yet pressed their request-to-speak buttons. It would be helpful if they could do so.

09:52

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):** Among other things, it is disappointing that so little of the Government’s focus is on the wider issue of regeneration. “Firm Foundations” seems to lean heavily in favour of new-build housing and fails to

recognise the opportunities that exist for recycling existing stock. Some of that stock may be of poor quality or its size may no longer meet the requirements of today's households, but there are ways of changing that. Several of the housing associations in my constituency and other areas have regenerated communities by restructuring housing stock to provide a better range of house type, size and tenure. The Government does not seem to acknowledge that way forward, although it provides one answer to the problem of land supply that the Government correctly cites as an issue.

Land supply is critical, but the minister must accept that many brownfield sites are expensive to regenerate, perhaps because they are undermined or contaminated. Remediation costs money. One idea that the minister might like to consider is having a specific funding mechanism to deal with the issue, especially for priority sites. Such a mechanism could help housing providers to unblock sites for development and reduce the cost burden on housing subsidy. It would also help to reduce the demand for land in the green belt to be released for house building.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I assume that the member is aware of the vacant and derelict land fund. That money was in two separate funds under the previous Administration, but we have brought it together in a single fund. The fund is to be distributed for the purpose that the member suggests, so I am not sure what point she is trying to make.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I am quite familiar with the fund, because it was set up by the previous Executive, but it does not tackle all the problems that we face. For example, housing associations need to be able to access it, so that they can expand into brownfield sites.

Bringing brownfield sites back into use is surely one of the most sustainable things that we can do. It was laudable that the Government took on the issue of energy efficiency in "Firm Foundations", but it did not set out a clear commitment on the housing sector's contribution to the economy's wider goal of an 80 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Indeed, as we see from the consultation responses, there are fears that even the commitments that the Government has made will not be met, because they are incompatible with its proposals for significant cost and subsidy reductions.

We all share the aspiration of providing a tenure mix in neighbourhoods to help retain residents within a community and to encourage the sustainability of communities in the longer term. However, housing associations in my constituency have told me that they find the tone of the chapter on social housing in "Firm Foundations" unduly negative. They also said that no account has been

taken of the diversity of provision or of the many successes that the housing association movement and local authority sector have achieved.

Over the years, the housing association movement has been innovative and has built an excellent track record of delivery. Why, then, is the Government determined to introduce competition and, possibly, a reduction in the number of organisations that can compete to deliver houses? In October last year, the Government made a statement on housing. I raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing my concerns about the lead developer model. Again, I ask the Minister for Communities and Sport to think about how the proposal will affect the geographically based housing associations that have built up trust and confidence in an area and housing associations that deal with specific client groups, including those with particular needs.

The wider actions of housing associations in my area have been extremely innovative. For example, Queens Cross Housing Association has built workshop units to help small businesses get started. Mr Harvie and I have been the beneficiaries of that policy at various times. Maryhill Housing Association has supported local people in a successful self-build project, and North Glasgow Housing Association has built some of the best wheelchair-accessible housing that I have seen. Matters such as that are important. Given that around £14 million is spent annually in Glasgow alone on adapting existing houses for disabled people, surely it is more sensible for a proportion of new-build houses to be designed to be barrier free.

On the Glasgow Housing Association, I am pleased that the cabinet secretary recognised the significance of the Mazars report and the fact that it requires to be transparently and independently scrutinised. I heard what the minister said this morning on the Housing Regulator, but that is not the right route to go down. The scrutiny process must be believable and trustworthy for everyone to have confidence in it. As we know, the Housing Regulator has signed off GHA's documents. I ask the minister to think again on that proposal. I also ask him to commit to establishing a clear process and a definitive timetable that will allow Glasgow to move forward and have the kind of community ownership that so many people in the city voted for and want to be part of.

Surely the Government must realise that, although the housing policies of the Opposition may differ, we agree on at least three things: that housing is one of the most important issues that we must tackle; that the Government's approach is flawed; and that, collectively, we will continue to hold the Government to account.

09:58

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I believe that housing, along with health and education, must be up there at the top of the list of priorities for the Government and Parliament. Indeed, a successful housing policy is a prerequisite of achieving our objectives in health and education policy.

From the beginning of the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today, no Government has broken the back of the housing problem in Scotland. Even in the 1950s and 1960s, when up to 50,000 new houses were being built, Governments may have achieved the numbers, but they did not achieve the quality of build. Today—50 years later—we are still grappling with the lack of quality in much of that housing. We have inherited multistorey buildings and damp housing. Much of the blight that afflicts housing today is the result of a dash for numbers and not quality housing. We need to reconcile the need for a substantial increase in the number of houses that can be made available with the need for a dramatic improvement in housing quality that includes energy efficiency.

**Robert Brown:** Does Alex Neil accept that that reinforces Patricia Ferguson's point about the wider regeneration aspect of housing policy? Surely regeneration should be a significant element of any Government's housing programme.

**Alex Neil:** Absolutely. It is a significant part of this Government's policy, as outlined in its regeneration strategy and housing policy.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Neil:** I need to continue.

I welcome the Government's commitment to increase the house building rate in Scotland by 40 per cent over the next few years. In many of the areas that I represent, including North Lanarkshire, the chances of someone getting a house are slim, particularly if they have special needs. People are in despair. It is almost impossible to guarantee that the many people who are desperately in need of a house will be able to get one.

In Scotland, up to 230,000 people are on the waiting list for rented housing and yet we are building only 24,000 new houses. Even allowing for Patricia Ferguson's valid point about the need to make more use of existing property, the reality is that current supply is nowhere near to meeting the level of demand. I welcome the fact that a central plank of the Government's strategy is to increase substantially the number of new houses that are to be built in Scotland for sale and social housing.

**Johann Lamont:** I note what the member says about the dash for numbers and I agree with him on that. However, one of our main criticisms of Government housing policy is that, in setting a target of 35,000, it may get the numbers but not meet the needs that have been identified. Does the member agree that the minister should indicate his target for social rented housing within the overall target of 35,000 to ensure that the Government does not get into the position that the member described of having built the houses but not met the need?

**Alex Neil:** I agree that there is a need to ensure that we meet the demand for social housing, and the minister intends to do that. The obsession with targets is a problem: very often, targets are used to distort policy. The key thing for the Government to do is to provide the level of social housing for first-time buyers and the rented sector that is required to meet social and economic demand. The strategy that the minister has outlined, both in "Firm Foundations" and in his speech this morning, satisfies that requirement.

Over a number of years, I have—undoubtedly and rightly—stated my belief about the financial black hole in the funding of second-stage transfer. In reports that were commissioned by GHA and the previous Executive, independent consultants have estimated the shortfall to be anywhere between £200 million and £500 million. The major debate between GHA and the housing associations in Glasgow on the methodologies that they are employing to estimate the real cost of second-stage transfer is clear to see.

I welcome the minister's announcement that he is asking the independent regulator to assess the Mazars report. I say to him that, once that assessment is available, he should take a page out of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's book and appoint an independent scrutiny panel, as she did in resolving the issues around the closure of the accident and emergency units.

Once we have the regulator's report, the logical next step will be to have the equivalent of an independent scrutiny panel. We need a panel that will listen to both sides, examine professionally the methodologies that both sides applied and come up with a set of firm recommendations for the way forward. I appeal to both sides—GHA and the housing associations—to agree to accept the recommendations of such a panel. GHA was a costly mistake, but we are where we are and we are all keen to move forward to second-stage transfer, so the minister should consider now how we should act on the report from the independent regulator, with a view to reaching a firm and satisfactory conclusion to an on-going problem.

10:05

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I am glad that we have moved on to a slightly more reflective vein.

If legitimate criticisms have been made in housing debates of Labour's record on issues such as the achievability of its homelessness policy, the unintended consequences of that policy and of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on existing tenants, especially older people with a long-term commitment to living in rented housing, and the sufficiency of the financial headroom to achieve second-stage transfer in Glasgow, surely the onus is on the new Administration to address those issues and to begin to debate how to progress them. Despite the flood of documents from the Government and the minister's repeated statements in the chamber, he has not begun to address any of the real issues; he has not given specifics. When he does give figures—for example, the £25 million for building council houses—their effects are hyped way above the actual impact that they will have. We are talking about 200 houses over three years; that is the substance of what the minister proposes.

Last year, the Executive provided £500 million for house building in Scotland. The minister has yet to announce his HAG allocations; they are three months late. Will he match the previous Executive's figure plus an inflationary increase? He should do so if he is to increase the number of social rented houses. Alternatively, are we facing a reduction in funding? Is that the reality? Brave new words have been spoken about the number of new houses that will be built, but the reality is that we will end up with less social rented housing.

Second-stage transfer has been long delayed. However, the minister has yet to say what he is saying to Shettleston Housing Association, what progress is being made with Govanhill Housing Association, where we are going with the Gorbals, what the issues are with Queens Cross Housing Association, and whether tenant-controlled housing has a future as part of the second-stage transfer process. The minister has given no specifics. Probably the most important fact is that no specifics are being given on tenants who will remain with GHA. Nearly 50 per cent of those who currently live in rented housing in Glasgow have an interest in the future of GHA. It does not make sense for the minister to seek to batter into that association when so many people in Glasgow depend on its having a viable financial future. There are issues to do with the second-stage transfer and the housing associations that the minister needs to progress, but he must take a balanced approach. Alex Neil has an interesting view on that, but he needs to ask the minister exactly what he is going to do.

Let me take things closer to home for the minister. The minister represents the West of Scotland regional constituency. Professor Glen Bramley has said that Bearsden and Milngavie, which I represent, have the highest level of unmet housing need in Scotland. Constituents of mine, many of whom have disabilities, have no chance of getting a home in the area that they have lived in for many years. There is no prospect of new council housing in the area. What will the minister do to ensure that the unmet need in Bearsden and Milngavie will be met for the people who live there through the housing association or council housing route?

The minister represents Clydebank, which is also in my constituency. A substantial amount of housing in Clydebank is long past its usefulness. Substantial numbers of homes in high-rise buildings require to be refurbished, where that is possible, or replaced. GHA has taken such an agenda forward in Glasgow. The previous Administration invested substantial amounts of money to try to meet the housing needs of an area in which there was a lot of housing on which a substantial amount of work needed to be done. I want to see the same kind of investment in Clydebank and the same urgent addressing of people's real needs that has taken place in Glasgow. We look across the border at Glasgow and ask, "Why can't we have some of that investment?"

What is the minister going to do for his and my constituents who want to live in decent housing conditions? They deserve to have the benefits that substantial housing investment brings. I freely acknowledge that they are suffering because there has been underinvestment in the past, but the issue for the Government is what we will do for them in the future. We represent them and they should be at the forefront of our thoughts. They do not deserve to live in damp or inadequate houses or houses that are falling down, or to be next-door neighbours of people who cause them serious social problems. What are the minister's policies on housing investment, a housing allocation strategy, and linking that strategy with an antisocial behaviour strategy? How will he progress matters on my constituents' behalf? That is what they want to hear.

10:11

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** A number of important issues have rightly been raised in the debate. However, I want to concentrate on the second-stage stock transfer.

Thirty years ago, there were 186,000 council houses in Glasgow, many of which were of poor quality—they were badly maintained and managed in an unresponsive and insensitive way. The dead

hand of municipal socialism weighed heavily on the genuine aspirations of Glasgow's council house tenants.

Things had to change. The engine for that change was the genuine realisation by all serious politicians that people must be given a greater say in their housing conditions. The facts cannot be denied. People respond positively when they are given responsibility for their own housing lot. The Conservative Government introduced the right-to-buy legislation—we are not debating that today, however—and the housing association movement was formed and grew. That movement has been a tremendous—indeed, an outstanding—success.

When the Parliament was established, we sought to build on those successes by implementing the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, which was a positive piece of legislation. I freely acknowledge that many Labour members had to show courage and imagination to go down that route. I had one caveat when the Housing (Scotland) Bill was being debated. Basically, I thought that we should have taken a whole step and passed responsibility from Glasgow City Council to smaller, manageable housing associations—Margaret Curran, who was heavily involved in the bill, would confirm that. I allowed myself to be persuaded that the median step of setting up GHA was necessary. However, I now regret that I allowed myself to be so easily persuaded. GHA was to be a facilitator, but it has turned out to be an impediment.

We must look closely at how we can break the log-jam. First, we must consider how housing associations' purchase applications are being processed. I cannot overstate how impressed I have been by the commitment of the dedicated staff of housing associations and tenant and management representatives to make things succeed. A lot of time and effort have been spent on doing so, but a lot of time and effort have also been wasted because GHA has not been responsive. I am not an estate agent or a quantity surveyor, but I know that some of the prices that GHA has quoted for potential purchases do not make sense. They do not do so for several reasons, which the Mazars report highlights well. GHA has fixed pricing and there has been complete inconsistency throughout the process.

The treatment of central costs that arise from stock loss from demolitions and right-to-buy transactions is totally inconsistent with the approach to stock loss through secondary stock transfer. The interest cost savings that have resulted from a lower than forecast level of borrowing are being used to fund non-SST projects. If those funds had been used to facilitate SST, we would be a great deal further down the

road. There is a take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards the costs involved.

Should there not be some form of negotiation? Should people not be speaking to one another? Should the Scottish Government not be telling GHA to speak to potential purchasers to find out whether a satisfactory outcome can be reached? The present situation cannot be allowed to continue. It would be the ultimate irony if those people who find themselves stymied in their genuine aspiration to buy their own homes had to resort to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, another piece of legislation that the Scottish Parliament passed, not without controversy, which was famously described as the Mugabe land grab—

**Members:** By you.

**Bill Aitken:** Yes, by me.

That is a possibility, so the situation must be addressed.

What progress has been made? The minister acknowledged that the Mazars report has raised issues that must be resolved. I welcome the initial—albeit faltering—steps that he has taken. However, it must be said that the invited involvement in the process of a regulator whose attitude in the past has been that GHA's valuation methodology is appropriate is extremely worrying, because clearly that methodology is not appropriate. Neutrality has been seriously prejudiced.

The present situation cannot be allowed to continue; it must be resolved. Once that has happened, it will make an immeasurable difference to the housing ambitions and the housing stock of the city of Glasgow.

10:17

**Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Last week, I welcomed the opportunity that the Conservatives' motion afforded us to debate housing. I welcome the fact that we have another opportunity to debate housing this morning. Last week, I had to temper my welcome by highlighting that I could find little in the Tory motion with which I could agree. Although I can agree with more of today's Labour motion, I still find myself in disagreement with much of it.

Stewart Maxwell stated where his opposition to the wording of the motion lies. My opposition, too, relates principally to the part of it that attempts to spin the responses to the Government's "Firm Foundations" document as negative. On the contrary, as the minister set out, it received a positive response. The 387 responses, which came from local authorities, tenants groups, housing associations and other organisations and

individuals, were independently assessed and that independent assessment indicated that, far from “Firm Foundations” receiving a negative response, there was strong support for the Government’s proposals.

Support was strongest in relation to an issue that the Labour Party has not dared to mention, either in its amendment last week or in today’s motion—the right to buy. Bill Aitken suggested that the right to buy is not for debate today, but I beg to differ—consideration of the right to buy is fundamental to determining how we move forward with our housing policy.

**Johann Lamont:** It might be helpful if the member clarified his understanding of his party’s policy. How many houses will be affected by the change to the right to buy? If his party’s hostility to right to buy is so strong, why does his minister not advocate its total abolition?

**Jamie Hepburn:** The policy is easy to understand: I would have thought that even Johann Lamont could understand it. The policy will eradicate the right to buy for all new-build social housing, which will remove the disincentive for local authorities to build new council homes. Already, proposals have been made to build far more council houses than have been built over the past few years.

At least the Tories had the guts to nail their colours to the mast in last week’s motion—although they seem more silent on the matter this week. I totally disagree with their position on the Government’s proposals on the right to buy, but at least I know where they stand. What is Labour’s position on the right to buy? Does it support the continuation of a Thatcher-inspired policy that has led to a chronic shortage of council housing or does it support the SNP Government’s proposal to restrict it—which, incidentally, received wide support from respondees to the consultation on “Firm Foundations”? As Stewart Maxwell mentioned, 94 per cent of those who responded to the Government’s consultation support that proposal.

We need to know what Labour’s stance is on the proposal. When it was first mooted, Wendy Alexander seemed to support it but, as recent days have shown, she is not beyond making the odd U-turn now and then. Perhaps we will be enlightened about Labour’s position in the course of the debate, but I will not hold my breath.

I turn to the other issue to which the motion refers—housing stock transfer and, in particular, second-stage transfer in Glasgow. I hope that Labour members have the good grace to acknowledge that Stewart Maxwell’s amendment offers the Government’s support for the suggestion that the Mazars report should be

“subject to open, transparent and independent scrutiny.”

That is what the Labour Party calls for in its motion, and the minister’s amendment agrees to precisely that. There should be no suggestion that this Government is afraid of

“open, transparent and independent scrutiny.”

However, Labour members might yet live to regret the call that they have made. After all, their handling of the Glasgow housing stock transfer, and second-stage transfer in particular, was a complete mess. Mazars has already found serious flaws in the process that worked against the interests of tenants in Glasgow. The SNP Administration is having to iron out those flaws and clean up that mess.

That brings me to the wider issue of stock transfer in general and the Tory amendment. It seems that the Conservatives are staying true to the position that they adopted last week. They seem to have bought Gordon Brown’s stock transfer bribe hook, line and sinker. Last week, the Conservatives told us that we should meekly accept the rules on Scotland’s housing debt as they stand, whereby the Treasury will service that debt only if it goes hand in hand with housing stock transfer. The Conservatives told us that those rules were the only game in town. The Tories’ acquiescence with the rules of the game as set by Gordon Brown hardly counts as standing up for Scotland’s council tenants. Why must we accept those rules?

I repeat what I said last week: if the Treasury has the money to take on Scotland’s council housing debts, it should do so unconditionally, rather than hold a proverbial gun to the head of Scottish council tenants. We should stand up for that principle. If we do anything less, it will be a sad failure to stick up for Scotland’s council tenants.

Much remains to be done to address Scotland’s housing needs. Too many people languish on homelessness registers. We must ensure that their fundamental human right to shelter and a home to call their own is upheld. We might disagree on how to get there, but I hope and trust that that goal is common to us all. I welcome the Scottish Government’s efforts thus far, and I look forward to more progress being made in the coming years.

10:23

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I am grateful that we are debating housing again, and I speak in support of the motion in the name of Johann Lamont.

Housing is essential for everyone. Too many people face a dismal future if this Government

does not produce a housing strategy. Housing was a high priority for the previous Government, and if the present Government does not build on the legacy that it inherited, it risks losing the good work that was done. The Labour motion is wide-ranging. The fact that it covers a great many housing issues shows the complexity of the problem. I will address one or two of those issues.

I have the privilege of representing one of the most beautiful parts of the world, but its beauty has a knock-on effect on housing. Houses for sale on the open market are attractive to people from outside the area, either as a second home or as a base to move to in a prime area for a change of lifestyle. Those people tend to have finance from property or savings that allows them to outbid locals easily. On the other hand, locals tend to have several jobs, some of which are seasonal or temporary, which means that they do not have the security or amount of income to allow them to compete. That leads to many people living with their families in substandard accommodation or caravans.

We need to tackle the market imbalance that is created by second home ownership by developing two different markets: one for second homes and one for those who live and work in an area. That has been done successfully in other areas. By creating two markets, we can ensure that the needs and aspirations of both communities are met. Locals will not be outpriced by people moving into the area and will be able to own or rent their own homes. However, we do not want to prevent communities benefiting from the economic boost that comes via second home and holiday home ownership.

Building affordable houses for rent or purchase has its challenges in rural areas, because there are no economies of scale. Because of their size, villages need only one or two houses, which prove expensive to build due to the small size of the development. Additional costs are incurred when securing services in rural areas: telephone and electricity connection costs can be horrendous, and access to water and sewerage services can be non-existent. Many small villages have access only to private water supplies that cannot be easily upgraded to supply new properties, and the same applies to sewerage systems.

Housing associations that are grounded in their communities are more likely to reach solutions and create developments that are sympathetic to their surroundings. For example, Albyn Housing Society has ensured that its house designs fit with local properties and take on the character of the local village. The association is aware of the additional costs and challenges of building in rural areas.

Fuel poverty can be a big problem in rural areas. There are few alternatives to electricity, which can

be expensive. The cost of electricity means that people of all ages can be reluctant to heat their homes. Housing associations are thinking imaginatively about those problems, and some have developed community heating schemes. Others, such as Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association, are installing renewable heat sources—heat pumps—in new properties. They are also investigating heat capture schemes for existing housing. They are not cheap to install, but they help tenants and owners to access affordable power, and thus tackle fuel poverty.

The Government's rhetoric does little to encourage housing associations—it devalues them. The Government lumps them together with the private sector and ignores their social remit and benefit.

The Government boasts of investing £25 million in housing, but that amount is derisory when compared with the £160 million debt write-off that was available to Highland Council for its housing debt. That money could have come to the Highlands had it not been for the SNP-led campaign to reject the investment.

Highland Council tenants now face an inflation-busting rent increase of 5.3 per cent, while the council freezes council tax for the laird. This is Robin Hood in reverse: taking from the poor and giving to the rich. On top of its £160 million debt, Highland Council must now find money to fund a £247 million investment to meet the Scottish housing quality standard. How small its share of the lauded £25 million appears in comparison. Highland tenants must rue the day that they were so badly misled.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the member agree that a housing stock transfer vote in which tenants are told that they must vote yes or the council's housing debt will not be written off is UK Government blackmail, and that the Government should be prepared to write off the debt no matter what?

**Rhoda Grant:** I will come to that point. However, I must point out to the member that tenants in the Highlands look across the Minch to the Western Isles and see that a debt of £38 million has been written off there, that upgrading is not just a dream, and that there is the promise of new houses and a £12.5 million investment. The same is happening in Argyll and Bute. How Highland Council tenants must rue the day.

Community ownership can never be privatisation. How can the SNP look both ways by supporting community ownership under land reform and opposing it under housing stock transfer? What is the difference? The previous speaker and the member who intervened have told us what the difference is: it is the

manufactured fight with Westminster. Again, we see the SNP's constitutional ambitions being put ahead of the needs of the poorest in our communities. That is shocking and wrong. The Government has a moral obligation to put the situation right for the people of the Highlands.

10:30

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I will devote my remarks, which I hope will be constructive, primarily to the thorny issue of Glasgow Housing Association. Other people, of course, did not support stock transfer from the beginning, and it is sometimes forgotten that the SNP organisations in Glasgow were split on the matter. I supported community empowerment and stock transfer from the beginning, because I believed it was right that tenants should be genuinely and effectively empowered with regard to their homes and environment. I did so also because of the scale of the failure of the large municipal model in Glasgow, the crippling effect of the accumulated debt and the genuine potential for a new beginning. Finally, I did so because I had seen the huge, life-changing success of community-based housing associations in transforming local communities.

GHA was always intended to be an interim body. I concur with Bill Aitken's comments in that regard and with his tribute to the work that is done by many housing professionals and people in the housing field in the area. I do not always agree with Bill Aitken, but he made a splendid speech that was a model of casting light on the issue.

As I said, GHA was intended to be an interim body, pending the move to second-stage transfer. Unfortunately, it has since morphed into a body that clearly regards itself as a permanent feature of the housing landscape in Glasgow. It was, of course, given a poor report on its performance by Communities Scotland. However, above all, its progress towards second-stage transfers and genuine community empowerment has, in reality, been negligible. The suggestion that Communities Scotland should be the scrutiny body made my heart sink, because Communities Scotland was involved, took sides and backed GHA's view of the world and the valuation arrangements that it suggested. That has done much damage to the potential for Communities Scotland to be regarded as an independent player in this operation.

The central issue is the fair value for which GHA will agree to convey houses to local housing bodies. This apparently technical question has caused huge uproar and anger across the sector. I do not pretend to understand the finer points of the calculations, but we have the Mazars report to help us, which lays out the detail in ways that even I can understand. In a nutshell, the report states

that if GHA conveyed every house to local housing bodies, the result would be an organisation with no houses, a large headquarters operation and staff, and many hundreds of millions of pounds of resource. Even in the mysterious world of stock transfer finance, that must be nuts.

Mazars has analysed the essence of the principle of financial neutrality, which is the basis of GHA's approach to valuation. The report states that the principle is not fair to tenants who transfer, and that GHA's price requirement is 6.4 times the security value that a lender would be prepared to consider, therefore there is a huge gap between GHA's valuation and what local housing organisations can afford to pay. Mazars states that GHA's valuation methodology fails to disaggregate entire cost categories, such as Glasgow gold and the tenant participation budget, and contingency, management and central overhead costs. It proceeds on the assumption that each stock transfer is treated as a first and only transaction, ignoring the fact that it is part of a process.

For example, business case submissions have been made for 39 LHO areas totalling 27,243 housing units, which is about a third of the stock. However, almost 50 per cent of all the costs for those housing units is deemed to be retained by GHA. On the other hand, 100 per cent of costs is disaggregated if a house is sold under the right to buy or is demolished. GHA cannot have its cake and eat it on those calculations.

The report also highlights the amazing information that GHA's staff costs increased by 32 per cent from 2004 to 2007, whereas the number of houses went down by 14 per cent. The result is an increase in staff costs per unit of 53 per cent. The associated report by Housing Regeneration Consultants Ltd suggests that, even if GHA were to transfer all its stock, 83 per cent of central employee costs would remain.

There are two ways forward. The first is to accept GHA's own analysis, chuck community empowerment in the bin and accept that most social housing in Glasgow be run for the indefinite future by an unelected body that is not effectively accountable to ministers, councillors or tenants. That, with a few presentational glosses, appeared to be the position adopted hitherto by ministers. The second way forward is for ministers to tackle the valuation issue, commit unequivocally to second-stage transfer and do what is necessary to deliver. The minister has a huge advantage here. He comes to the issue fresh, with clean hands. He did not set up GHA or agree to the figures or the methodology. He is not committed to GHA's preconceptions on the matter. He will have the support of every member if he can cut the Gordian knot and realise the original vision.

I welcome the minister's commitment and his intention to engage with the valuation issue—that

is a big move forward. However, the process must be open, truly independent and pursued with conviction. I have serious reservations about the Communities Scotland situation. When knowledgeable people such as Bill Aitken, Johann Lamont, Patricia Ferguson and Alex Neil express reservations about it, the minister should also have reservations. There needs to be an independent scrutiny process. Alex Neil's suggestion of an independent scrutiny panel is useful and helpful, and could be taken forward. There could also be some advantage in the minister drawing together a number of those of us who represent Glasgow and have an interest in and modest knowledge of the issues, to establish whether there are other ways in which we can tackle the matter. It is important that we go forward collectively. Glasgow's housing challenge is the most significant in Scotland. Successful stock transfer is in all our interests, but particularly those of hard-pressed tenants. We are at a crucial point that will determine the way forward for a generation. A lot depends on the minister getting the process right. If he does so, he will have the Liberal Democrats' support.

10:36

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** I, too, will focus on the parts of the motion that relate to housing stock transfer in Glasgow. Like other members, I have read the Mazars report, which was commissioned by the Glasgow and west of Scotland forum of housing associations. It makes compelling reading, and raises serious doubts about how GHA has arrived at its figures on the valuation of housing for second-stage transfer.

As members have said, GHA was always supposed to be a transitional organisation—a stepping stone to community ownership by local housing associations. However, the Mazars report points to GHA unfairly pricing community-based housing associations out of taking control of the very housing stock that stock transfer was supposed to give them in the first place. The price that housing associations pay for GHA stock is supposed to be underpinned by the principle of financial neutrality. That is to say, no tenant should be worse off as a result of any second-stage transfer—a principle that I am sure we all support and the Mazars report accepts.

Mazars identified a weakness in GHA's valuation process. GHA estimates that it needs to keep certain central financial reserves for its 70,000 houses. However, it estimates that it needs the same amount for managing 50,000 houses, 40,000 houses and 20,000 houses; indeed, if it had only one house, it would keep the same central reserves. Mazars considered GHA's finances and identified a series of GHA central

costs that one might reasonably assume would be reduced if it managed less stock. However, that is not the case, because GHA uses a highly questionable approach to housing stock transfer known as first and only. In other words, if only one housing association went to transfer, the reduction in costs would, at best, be marginal. The problem for GHA is that although there are 39 known business cases, totalling more than 20,000 units—or 38 per cent—of GHA stock, it does not anticipate any costs savings, except at the margins.

DTZ, GHA's independent valuers, valued the stock proposed for transfer at £46.1 million, yet GHA intends to charge almost £300 million. Taken with the flawed first and only methodology employed by GHA, the Mazars study points not to a gap in funds that are needed to achieve second-stage transfer but to a potential artificially created black hole which, if costs were disaggregated appropriately, could easily be plugged. For example, GHA has not disaggregated £163 million for employee costs and support services. According to GHA's logic, even with 27,000 fewer units, those central costs remain undiminished—not one less computer operator, not one less telephonist or legal adviser, and not even one less cleaner in GHA's shiny offices in the Trongate in Glasgow city centre.

Even £9 million that was set aside for tenant participation has not been disaggregated, despite there potentially being tens of thousands fewer tenants. I say to GHA that £9 million is a lot of glossy leaflets through the door of the poor last tenant who remains with GHA come second-stage transfer. They may be the most consulted tenant in social housing history.

**Johann Lamont:** I appreciate what Bob Doris is saying about the challenge that the Mazars report presents: it provides compelling evidence, which should be studied. Will he join me in urging the minister to ensure that people can have confidence that there will be an independent scrutiny process? That process ought not to go to the regulator, but he knows as well as I do that some people are in despair that that might be where it goes. Will he work to find a process by which there can be genuine independent scrutiny of the challenging issues that he has raised?

**Bob Doris:** I appreciate the tone of Johann Lamont's intervention and ask her to be patient, because I will deal with the issues she raises later.

The Mazars report represents to me the possibility that second-stage transfer is structured by GHA in a way that puts unfair financial barriers before community-based housing associations and undermines the principle of financial neutrality. According to Mazars, at the end of a 30-year period, the planned cash reserve per GHA

household is £550. If 20,000 households go to SST, the financial reserve would increase to £763 per unit, despite there being 40 per cent less stock. That is not financial neutrality; it is a massive cash windfall for GHA at the expense of those of its tenants who democratically decide to transfer.

An onlooker might say that GHA has come up with a charge to housing associations for SST that suits GHA, which casts it in the light of being an unwilling seller. GHA would claim that its charges are set fairly and independently, but housing associations have commissioned a weighty independent study that cannot just be brushed away. Indeed, the Mazars report's authors are the auditors of Audit Scotland. Mazars claims that the charges for SST are unfair. We have on the one side GHA and on the other the housing associations. GHA needs to respond in a meaningful way to the Mazars study. I welcome the Government's amendment, which offers to facilitate discussions and mediation between GHA and housing associations, and to commit to ensuring that the Mazars study is subject to open, transparent and independent scrutiny. The same should apply to GHA's calculations in relation to SST.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Housing Regulator will consider the issue. We need a neutral third party—an independent referee, not someone commissioned by GHA or housing associations—to get involved and consider which figures stack up, although that final referee does not need to be the regulator: I am open-minded about who it should be. Much has been made of community-based housing associations taking ownership in their communities. It is now time to deliver.

10:43

**Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** For the first time ever, I need a microphone. I will try to make it through.

As expected, we have had a political knockabout this morning, in which the minister has described the 30,000 houses that were built and provided as affordable rented housing by the previous Executive as bad news. Only in his world.

I will concentrate on the experience in Inverclyde, and the difference between the minister's stated support for housing associations and his actions. The stock transfer had a real mandate in Inverclyde. There was a 65 per cent turnout—the envy of any politician—and a yes vote of 72 per cent. I have heard it said here and elsewhere that the people who took part in that vote were the victims of blackmail and that they were duped and bribed. That view is an insult to,

and a slur on, those who took part and who took their housing needs into their own hands. It was real engagement in and enthusiasm for the transfer.

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** Will Duncan McNeil give way?

**Duncan McNeil:** I am having enough difficulty getting through without interventions.

The transfer was power to the people in a real sense. We should be congratulating them on their wise decision because we now know that, if they had not made that choice, their lives would not be changing as they are changing now. The size of the turnout and majority made it impossible for the Government, despite its opposition to housing stock transfer, to do anything other than accept the will of those people.

How has the transfer changed people's lives? After five months, delivery is well under way. Community ownership has allowed a real focus on Inverclyde's housing needs. Where rents were among the highest in the country, affordable rents are now being tackled. Rents are capped by the retail prices index for five years, with the aim of holding them to that for 14 years. Improvements to services, tenant support and neighbourhood relationships, measures to tackle antisocial behaviour, welfare rights and a more responsive repair service are all in place and working. Investment of £83 million is in place for internal and external programmes in one of Scotland's smallest local authorities, and 850 new homes will be built by 2015. Importantly, that will link in with the wider regeneration activity and ambition for the area. It will give people homes, houses and—crucially—areas that they want to live in.

All that potential is denied to people in the Lothians, the Highlands and Renfrewshire on the basis of a political policy and principle. It is easy for somebody who lives in a nice house to be principled about the matter, but we need to get practical. This is about people's lives, which we can change by the decisions we make here. The policy needs to change and we need to get it right.

In Inverclyde, we still have concerns that are not historical. We are concerned about the Government's attitude to housing associations, which might have a direct impact on River Clyde Homes and all that it wants to do. We are concerned about the uncertainty about housing association grant funding that could scupper the policy of affordable rents, force rents up and affect our ambitious development plans. We are concerned about the drive to efficiency, which in everyday language means that cuts hang over our ambitions.

I ask the Government to recognise that housing associations that are managed by their tenants are

delivering. The Government should be careful that whatever actions it takes do not harm the progress and delivery that are changing people's lives for the better in my community.

10:49

**Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** We have heard a lot of nonsense from the Opposition, particularly Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who have raised hand wringing to the level of an Olympic sport and seem to have developed collective amnesia when it comes to their serial failures while in government. However, the Labour motion helpfully sets out where they went wrong. It lists affordable housing, of which they simply did not provide enough; social rented housing, which they almost stopped building; private rented housing, in which rents have gone through the roof; and problems in rural areas, which they did nothing to resolve.

**Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** Does Dave Thompson acknowledge the 36,000 housing association houses that were built under the previous Administration? Is that nothing?

**Dave Thompson:** I do not believe that there was anything like that number built. Let us consider the number of council houses that were built in the last three years of the Labour Party's reign: it managed to build only six. However, it also has the cheek to mention

"the problems facing local authorities where tenants voted against stock transfer".

How can it, with a straight face, demand that something be done to remedy a problem that it deliberately created by writing off the housing debt of councils where tenants voted for its policy of stock transfer while refusing similar treatment to councils whose tenants preferred to put their trust in local democracy? The thrust of the stock transfer debate was bribery and threat, with tenants being told that, if they voted no, they would get no improvements to their homes.

**Rhoda Grant:** Will Dave Thompson give way?

**Dave Thompson:** Not at the moment.

We saw such bribery and threat clearly in the Highlands, where a veritable army of council staff and a substantial war chest were lined up against a small tenants group with limited resources. Despite that serious imbalance, David beat Goliath once again, and I am proud to say I am a David who played a small part in the democratic rout of those who attempted to abuse their position by resorting to bribery and threats.

**Rhoda Grant:** If Dave Thompson now takes responsibility for duping and misleading the people in the Highlands, will he work with his Government to ensure that the debt is met and that the

inflation-busting rent increases for the people that he has duped are reversed?

**Dave Thompson:** I find it amazing that I am accused of duping the tenants in the Highlands. I ask Rhoda Grant to join us in our campaign to get the chancellor to write off the housing debt there and in other council areas. Highland Council tenants exercised their democratic right to stay with the council by 6,060 votes to 4,097. Rather than castigating the best Government that Scotland has ever had, Rhoda Grant and the Opposition should join us in our campaign to get justice for them. However, I do not expect the Liberals, Labour and the Conservatives to support us. That would be too much like doing something, and those parties have elevated inaction to an art form. The Lib-Lab Administration was so inactive that it built only six council houses over the last three years of its reign.

The sad reality is that Scottish local authority housing stock has halved under the tenure of Labour since 1997. From the right to buy to large-scale stock transfer, Labour's record in power has been shambolic, whereas the "Firm Foundations" consultation document is a breath of fresh air for thousands of Scots. Responses are positive, and there has been strong support for many of the document's proposals.

**Robert Brown:** There has been quite a lot of criticism of the SNP's figures, and Dave Thompson challenged the figure of 36,000 housing association houses that Margaret Curran gave. What does he say is the figure for housing association houses?

**Dave Thompson:** I am sure that the minister will give Robert Brown that detail in his closing speech.

The consultation responses showed extensive support for the establishment of a target to increase the rate of new housing supply to at least 35,000 houses a year. They showed support for shared-equity schemes and, most of all, they showed extremely strong support for the exemption of new build social housing from the right to buy.

"Firm Foundations" also encourages the private sector to play its part which, despite an expected economic downturn, it appears to be doing. On Tuesday, *The Press and Journal* ran a story with the headlines, "Developer Spends £30 Million to Snap up Three Sites" and "Inverness Promised 500 Homes by Tulloch." That £30 million investment in land for housing is a good example of how the private sector is rising to the challenge that this ambitious SNP Government has set for tackling the legacy of despair and hopelessness that the previous Administration left.

Housing problems that are traditionally associated with Scotland's big cities have become

increasingly prevalent in the Highlands and Islands, following eight years of Labour and the Liberals. Private housing rents have gone through the roof. A quick glance at the property-for-rent pages in *The Inverness Courier* and the *Ross-shire Journal* shows that standard two-bedroom flats in Inverness and Ross-shire now cost up to £650 a month, which is near the Edinburgh level. Just the other week, there was an article in *The Inverness Courier* on the city's housing shortage, with the headline, "Sofa for rent—at £40-a-week"—what a legacy.

10:55

**Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** I welcome this opportunity to discuss housing issues. I have criticised the topics for debate on a number of recent occasions, partly because there was so much agreement on the subjects that we did not need to have a debate. However, the same cannot be said for housing. There are challenges in the housing market but, having listened to the debate this morning, it seems to me that there is a difference of opinion about what the problem is and how to solve it. Even where the Scottish Government has some ideas, it appears to have no clue about how to put them into action.

I have been an elected representative for 20 years and I have noticed that housing is back at the top of the list of issues about which constituents are contacting me. For once, I agree with Alex Neil: along with health and education, housing is the issue about which people are most concerned.

I will return to specific demand, but I will start on a point of agreement: we need to increase the supply of affordable housing. The SNP criticises the previous Executive's record, but, under the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, 200,000 houses were built in Scotland, of which—I say this to Mr Thompson—about 35,000 were social rented or affordable homes.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing recently visited West Lothian to welcome the announcement that 240 new council houses are to be built. I welcome those houses, too, but we should be clear—the cabinet secretary was not clear—that they will be built using funding that West Lothian Council will raise through prudential borrowing, which has nothing to do with the £25 million that was announced at that time. There is a limit to how much even efficient councils can raise in that way. The SNP West Lothian Council has clearly decided that its colleagues in the Scottish Parliament are not going to help. That is a damning view of the SNP Government.

West Lothian Council has taken the step of increasing rents to pay for new housing. The SNP

in the Parliament crows about a council tax freeze, but the SNP West Lothian Council has increased council house rents this year by 6 per cent. Further increases will mean that rents will increase by 20 per cent over four years. There might be cynicism behind the decision to increase rents. A calculation might have been made of how many people are on housing benefit and whether it would matter if the council increased the rents. I have three problems with that. First, what are the current council tenants getting for the increase, particularly those who are having to find a substantial sum? Secondly, the council runs the risk of placing people in a benefits trap, whereby they cannot afford to lose their housing benefit, so employment opportunities are further limited. Thirdly, and more generally, is it right that the burden of building new housing should fall on a limited number of council house tenants, rather than on the general population?

It appears to me that West Lothian Council—perhaps like other councils—is taking such decisions because there is no support from the Scottish Government. What is the Scottish Government's replacement for stock transfer? When the SNP was in opposition, it presented stock transfer as privatisation. It was never privatisation; it provided housing investment, regeneration within communities and community empowerment. How does the minister intend to replace each of those benefits?

**Dave Thompson:** Will the member join us in our campaign to get the housing debt written off in councils such as Highland Council?

**Mary Mulligan:** Instead of making this issue a battle between us and Westminster, the member should accept the situation as it is at the moment and give people in the Highlands the opportunities that people in Inverclyde are clearly getting.

I said earlier that the number of constituents who have been contacting me about housing has increased. I am sure that that applies to other MSPs, too. I will finish by outlining specific problems that the minister and his Government have to tackle.

Homelessness is still an issue, despite investment and legislation from the previous Scottish Executive. Shelter has said that it expects

"to see a high profile given to tackling homelessness in local authority single outcome agreements."

Will that happen? Will the Government achieve the 2012 target or the more immediate 2009 interim target? Homelessness is a particular risk for young people. Their moving on to independent living, whether through choice or by necessity, is challenging and some of them will need support in a new tenancy. Perhaps the minister will tell us how he will offer such support.

Many families might have roofs over their heads, but are unsuitably housed. However, family housing is at a premium. Inclusion Scotland said that

“accessible housing should be considered as a basic human right.”

I am sure that we all agree, but barrier-free or adapted housing is not readily available. As the population ages, more people are likely to have problems that need to be addressed. Most people want to stay in their homes. In my constituency, I have seen amazing examples of how technology can enable people to do so, but some simple adaptations are just not available. How will the minister ensure that housing and health services work together to address that need?

I make no apology for challenging the minister to come up with positive action. The SNP has one more seat than Labour in this Parliament. That gave it the right to form a Government, but with that right come responsibilities. The Government cannot continue to blame someone else—the previous Scottish Executive, local authorities or housing associations. Today, the minister needs to start answering the housing questions.

11:01

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** Much as it must seem otherwise to the casual observer, or to anyone listening to the opening speech in this debate, the Local Government and Communities Committee does not disagree on every subject. There is a wide consensus among members of the committee, as elsewhere, that one of the key drivers of our wellbeing as a society is the ability of families and individuals to access good-quality affordable housing.

For that reason, the Government has published its intentions on housing in “Firm Foundations”. Those include delivering across all tenures an increased supply of housing that is built to higher environmental standards and making it possible, once more, for councils to build council houses. As Jamie Hepburn said, despite the attempts of some people to exclude that subject from the debate, there is no doubt that councils’ ability to build council houses, thanks to the abolition of the right to buy new social housing, is central to the debate on housing.

I make no apology for not being the first member to point to the stark contrast with the painful achievement of the previous Administration in that respect, which managed to build six council houses in Scotland during its term of office.

**Mary Mulligan:** Can the member tell us how many social rented and affordable houses were built?

**Alasdair Allan:** The member has already made the point that social housing was built in Scotland. I do not dispute that. However, the fact remains that only six council houses were built during the previous Government’s term in office.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alasdair Allan:** No thanks. I have just taken one.

Labour’s record of housing failure is no respecter of geography, even though the problems differ in different parts of Scotland. In my island constituency, several hundred people are waiting for affordable houses—a situation that the local housing association is now working to address.

**Rhoda Grant:** The member will be aware that without stock transfer and the £12.5 million injection of funding into his community, those people would be waiting an awful lot longer for such housing provision.

**Alasdair Allan:** I am wary about offering Labour advice on referendums in these fevered times, but unlike Rhoda Grant I accept the right of people to have their say in a referendum or local ballot. They should have that right without being told by the Treasury that unless their views are the same views—politically and dogmatically—as the Treasury’s, they will be punished for their decision.

The Western Isles is a unique community with housing problems that are different from those of many urban areas, but it is an example of why local authorities need the freedom to find solutions that work for them. For instance, the private rented sector plays a small part in the Western Isles, which means that the abolition of the right to buy new social rented houses will have an even more important role to play there. That was recently welcomed by the Western Isles Council and the Western Isles forum of tenants and residents associations.

Of course, it is not just the residents of rural Scotland who have been failed by the record of the previous Executive—a record that we are now being asked by some members to look back on as the veritable halcyon days of housing policy in Scotland. Right here in this city, the gaps in that former policy are writ large. In Edinburgh alone, an astonishing £300 million of housing debt has resulted in 40p in every £1 of rent being spent not on housing improvements, but merely on servicing that debt. That injustice takes place—

**David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Alasdair Allan:** I have taken two interventions.

That injustice takes place every day, even though no good reason has yet been given—

certainly not in the course of this debate—for why the Treasury can afford to write off debt for authorities whose tenants voted one way in ballots, but cannot do so for authorities where tenants voted another way. In contrast, “Firm Foundations” does much to help people who have housing hopes and aspirations: for example, the 90 per cent of under-35s who wish to own their own homes. There is also much in it to help the people of rural Scotland, who face an uphill struggle, as many members have said, to find an affordable place to live. It does much more to ensure that social housing gets built.

The SNP Government will end the right to buy for all new social housing. That has already kick-started local authorities into building new houses—Midlothian will build 1,000 units by 2010; West Lothian is seeking to build four sites to provide around 240 new homes; and Dundee is planning to build 135 new homes. In other words, three authorities alone will have built 229 times as many council houses as the previous Administration managed to.

Much about Labour’s stance these days is puzzling, but one of its strangest positions is its apparent nostalgia for a Thatcherite form of the right-to-buy policy. Whatever that policy’s limited benefits may have been, it is, even from the most charitable of viewpoints, past its sell-by date. The SNP will rise to the housing challenge. We have laid the framework to build 35,000 houses a year by 2015 and we have enabled younger people to take the first step on the property ladder; but perhaps most remarkably of all, we have made it realistically possible once more for councils to build council houses.

11:07

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** The debate has been wide ranging, but there is something about it that leaves me, and the Liberal Democrats, somewhat puzzled. The form and substance of a debate undoubtedly have to change over time; we all understand that. A year ago, Government ministers contributed to debates in which they quite rightly pointed out the Government’s aims and aspirations. That was perfectly understandable—they took the trouble to tell us what their vision was. One year on, however, we as a Parliament are entitled to expect that the form and the substance of those debates will have changed, and that we will have moved from simply repeating our election promises to explaining the form and substance of those proposals to Parliament in more detail.

It was helpful of Alex Neil to take us back to the earlier part of the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; he is probably the only member present who remembers that particular period. His

contribution served to point out that we have gone through various phases of housing development. He recalled in particular the rush for numbers, the use of system built housing—much of it very inappropriate for the Scottish climate—and government grants, which somewhat perversely gave more money to increase housing density. That is a quite extraordinary policy.

It is important in a debate such as this to recognise that Governments that seek to deal with those problems, and the subsequent Governments that spent more money, particularly on deprived areas, did so in good faith and according to their particular policy platform. The issue today is not about the previous Administration’s having done nothing, either immediately or over time. It is, rather, about what this Government, in detail, proposes to do to take things forward. That is what has disappointed members in the chamber.

With all due respect to David Thompson, who is sitting on my right—

**Dave Thompson:** On your left.

**Ross Finnie:** Sorry—on my left.

**Alex Neil:** No wonder you are confused.

**Ross Finnie:** It was more Mr Thompson’s remarks that confused me.

It is not good enough for David Thompson to come along with the morning papers and try to make the point, as Alasdair Allan did, that it is a sterile debate between the private sector and the public sector. It is not helpful to talk on and on about six council houses, as if those were the only houses that were built in the whole of Scotland. You know that that is not true, and it is not constructive in what has been essentially a very constructive debate.

We need to understand how the Government views its own position. Its amendment rather gives the lie to the idea that it has adjusted to being in government. The Minister for Communities and Sport

“calls on the Scottish Government to facilitate discussion”;

and

“urges the Scottish Government to bring forward a coherent strategy”

Well—hear, hear! A Government does not require a vote of the Parliament to lodge an administrative amendment that calls on it to bring forward a coherent strategy.

One year on, the Government does not quite seem to know that it is in government. That is not just in jest; there are serious—

**Dave Thompson:** Will the member give way?

**Ross Finnie:** Certainly.

**Dave Thompson:** As the member likes the amendment so much, will he vote for it later today?

**Ross Finnie:** You misunderstand me in saying that I like it; I am pointing out the absurdity of a Government calling on itself to bring forward a strategy. The Parliament ought to have been able to get that without our having perpetual Opposition debates to drag it out of the Government. The problem is that one year on, we are still in serious difficulties when it comes to fully understanding the situation.

Let us be clear, minister—we are not arguing with you about aspirations or the need to take forward the perplexing and difficult question of housing, whether that is social housing, rented housing, affordable housing or housing that will deal with homelessness. We have a shared view on those issues; we may disagree about some of the methods, but we do not disagree about the ultimate objective. However, we are entitled to expect the minister to tell us now, one year in, what he will do in greater detail.

It is not so much about numbers, but about the detail of how the minister proposes to achieve a better housing supply, and whether he recognises the issue that Patricia Ferguson raised regarding the important role that regeneration can play. If we examine the numbers, we see that there are so many houses that have been found wanting, for the reasons that Alex Neil pointed out. Problems therefore arise in regard to areas that need not just new housing, but regeneration. We need to know in much more detail what we are going to do, and how we are going to meet the homelessness target. We know that you have signed up—all members of the Parliament have signed up—to the homelessness target, but we do not know what you propose to do on that for the next three years.

Bill Aitken made a helpful and thoughtful contribution on GHA, and he was warmly supported by my colleague Robert Brown. I hope that the minister will not be beguiled into believing that turning the GHA problem over to the Scottish Housing Regulator will be at all appropriate. Alex Neil was correct to say that we need independent scrutiny. The Scottish Housing Regulator cannot be described as independent—it has already made it clear that it has signed up to proposals by GHA to which no Government minister ever instructed it to sign up. That is its position, and therefore some form of arbitration is vital for the situation to be resolved.

The motion that has been lodged, and the amendments in the name of the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives make it clear to the Government the sort of direction that we are prepared to support. However, we urgently need

the Government to come back to the chamber with detailed proposals. It certainly does not need an amendment in its own name to do so; it should do so as the Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** I urge members to avoid use of the second person, because—particularly when they address the person who is sitting next to them—the debate can degenerate into a conversation.

11:15

**David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** In some respects, the debate has been a reprise of last week's Conservative debate on housing, although it is none the worse for that, given the importance of the issues that we address.

As Jamie McGrigor said when he moved the Conservative amendment, we make no apology for returning to the fundamental issue of housing stock transfer, because at stake is a sum in excess of £2 billion, which would wipe out the housing debt of local authorities in Scotland, if they were prepared to transfer the remainder of their housing stock to local housing associations. As we heard from Duncan McNeil and other members, that would facilitate new investment in social housing and transform many parts of our country.

**Alex Neil:** Bill Aitken said that his one regret in supporting GHA was his agreement to the transfer of stock wholesale to a single organisation. If the member is in favour of the policy, does he think that the Treasury should be flexible enough to allow debt to be written off in return for transfer to numerous housing associations?

**David McLetchie:** I believe that that is the Treasury's position, which was confirmed to the Parliament by housing ministers in the previous Executive. I whole-heartedly support that position.

We cannot sit back and idly ignore £2 billion for ideological reasons or because some members place a higher premium on picking fights with Westminster than they do on improving the quality and quantity of our housing stock and changing lives for the better.

During last week's debate, the minister said that any transfer of local authority stock to a housing association should take place on the basis of tenants' approval in a ballot. We agree with him. The Conservatives invented the concept of tenant ballots on housing stock transfers, so we need no lessons or reminders from the minister on that score.

The minister lamented—during last week's debate and today—the Treasury's unwillingness to write off the housing debt of councils that do not

want to transfer their stock, which he said penalises tenants who want the council to remain as their landlord. Other SNP members made the same point. However, we all know that one reason for the Treasury's approach is that the Government and the Treasury have little or no confidence in local authorities as landlords—a judgment that is borne out by the evidence over a long period. The Treasury has said that if there is to be a fresh financial start there must be new management, based on housing associations, in which there is significant tenant representation.

The Treasury is absolutely right on that point, but I acknowledge that the SNP takes a contrary view in pursuit of its strategy of sucking up to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. However, the issue is not who is right or wrong but the practical consequences of the Treasury's position. The minister said last week:

"we must live with the Treasury's intransigence—we do not have the powers or resources to do otherwise."—*[Official Report, 1 May 2008; c 8018.]*

He was absolutely right; he does not have the power or resources to do otherwise. That is not a good reason to stand and girm on the sidelines with Jamie Hepburn and the rest of the SNP, ignoring the £2 billion that is there for the asking and the taking. It is irresponsible to take such a position, given the extent of housing need in Scotland, which many members have mentioned.

Given that so much money is at stake, the SNP Government should be actively discussing the matter with councils and the Treasury, to ascertain whether wholesale or partial stock transfers can be effected, not only in areas where tenants rejected transfers but in other council areas. However, instead of pursuing a policy that could transform social housing in many areas there is a lot of piddling around with a puny, low-budget council house building programme, which flies in the face of the policy pursued by Governments of all persuasions during the past 30 years. SNP policy undermines the leading role of housing associations, which was well described by Patricia Ferguson, Bill Aitken and Robert Brown, and seeks to subvert the whole concept of right to buy.

I am proud to proclaim that the introduction of right to buy was the greatest of the many great achievements of the last Conservative Government. In our 18 years in office, nearly 300,000 tenants exercised their right to buy and I am delighted that under Labour and the Liberals in the years since 1997 the best part of 145,000 homes were sold to their tenants under that Conservative legislation. Those are not "limited benefits", as Alasdair Allan suggested. No party has done more to make housing affordable for working people in this country than the Conservative party did when it passed legislation

to enable working people to fulfil their aspirations to own their own homes. We should rejoice in that, but instead a lot of nonsensical propaganda is put out by members who are instinctively hostile to the right to buy, such as Jamie Hepburn, who suggested that, somehow, the policy has been at the expense of building new homes for rent. Rubbish. Quite the contrary.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**David McLetchie:** I will give the member the numbers. In 18 years of Conservative government, more than 91,000 new homes for rent were built by councils and registered social landlords, and in the past 10 years approximately 44,000 homes have been built on the same basis. For every three homes sold, one new home for rent has been added to the housing stock and many more have been improved. It is disgraceful that this Government is imposing further restrictions on right to buy. The existing legislation is more than adequate for the purpose.

The debate has shown the SNP in its true colours. It has no coherent housing policy and its position is built on distortion, misrepresentation, a wilful disregard for the facts, political tokenism and a preference for picking fights over improving homes. The SNP could and must do a lot better for the sake of tenants and people in Scotland who need affordable housing.

11:21

**Stewart Maxwell:** The debate can best be described as exhaustive—other members might call it exhausting. Many important points were made and I will try to address some of them.

I have said this before on the record and I make it clear again that housing associations will continue to be the primary developers and managers of social housing stock. We have made that clear. However, we want there to be other providers, including local authorities.

**Johann Lamont:** Will the minister confirm that he will match—plus inflation—the £501 million that the previous Executive provided in housing association grant in its final year?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Our investment in social housing during the next three years will be in excess of £1.5 billion—a 19 per cent increase on the plans of the previous Executive. We will take no lessons on the priority that we give to housing in our budget.

On the Tory amendment, as I said on the record last week, I am not opposed in principle to local tenants voting for stock transfer, if that can be taken forward in a financially neutral way. However, in the four failed ballots £148.4 million—almost £150 million—was wasted in trying to get

people to vote for stock transfer. Some 1,900 houses could have been built with that money, but the money was wasted by previous Executives. That is what was lost by the attempt to push stock transfer on areas that did not want it.

The debate began with a long moan from Johann Lamont. She made a number of points about how doomed we all are in the context of housing policy. I point out to her that the HAG consultation is based on the business cases and predictions of the housing association movement, which says that its intention on rent increases is RPI plus 1 per cent. We are matching HAG to the movement's intentions, which is absolutely the correct thing to do.

Prevention of homelessness is one of our main weapons in the attempt to reduce homelessness in our country. The homelessness monitoring group recently reported, and in 2009 there will be the milestone towards the 2012 target. Jim Tolson did not appear to understand the 2012 target, which is to abolish priority need and not what he said that it is. It is clear that he is unaware of the facts of the matter.

Jamie McGrigor talked about stock transfer. As I said, there is no free lunch. The idea that £2 billion is ready to be handed over—in a big brown envelope, I presume—for us to take and use, free of any cost to the Scottish Government, presents a false picture of the stock transfer reality.

We believe in local democracy. SNP policy was not to oppose stock transfer, but we had huge concerns about the vast stock transfers that were proposed in Glasgow. Individual SNP members opposed stock transfer—they had the right to do that. Individual Labour members also opposed mass stock transfer. Different views were held.

**David McLetchie:** Which SNP members supported housing stock transfer in the Highlands?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I have described the SNP policy position, which was that we did not oppose stock transfer. However, we opposed mass stock transfer—members throughout the chamber have spent the past two hours describing what a mess that was in Glasgow. Despite all the complaints about the GHA situation, we are told that it was somehow wrong for us to make such points, which Bill Aitken made in his speech.

Jamie McGrigor mentioned the private sector, with which we are working closely. We have made many important strides forward in working with that sector and particularly with the private rented sector. We also have a close working relationship with the building industry.

Funding for supporting people has not disappeared; it is still there and is part of the local

government settlement. The written answer that Jim Tolson quoted says that we intend to build more houses than the previous Administration did. That provides a clear answer to his question.

The pressure on the social housing sector is acute. It did not just magically appear last May; it has been there for years and has built up for many decades. Finally, the Government is trying to deal with the problem.

Patricia Ferguson talked about the housing association sector in detail. We believe that the sector will remain the main supplier of social housing. Housing associations will continue to be able to grow and will gain and manage new stock under our plans. That is absolutely the case and I guarantee that.

Continuing down the previous path would be unsustainable and would mean fewer houses for more money. I make no apology for reiterating that we need value for money in the sector.

Alex Neil talked about pressure, the lack of supply and the complete mismatch between demand and supply in the Scottish housing sector. That has existed for many years and it is unfortunate that it was not dealt with in the radical way that was needed.

Alex Neil also talked about the Housing Regulator. I understand the position of many members, including Robert Brown, on the Housing Regulator, but it is right and proper to give the regulator the opportunity to give advice on the Mazars report. The suggestion of an independent scrutiny panel is interesting and we must consider it, but it is right and proper to await the Housing Regulator's report, which I have said that I will publish before the end of the month. When that is available, we will re-examine the issue.

**Robert Brown:** The minister has partly answered my questions. Will he keep an open mind about the way forward beyond the Housing Regulator's report? Will he think again about whether that is the be-all and end-all of the response, given the lack of confidence in the regulator on the issue?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I hope that Robert Brown accepts that I have just said that I have an open mind on the matter. However, it is right and proper to give the Housing Regulator its place, which is to give advice on the report.

Des McNulty said that we propose to build 200 council houses over three years, but "Firm Foundations" says that we expect to build between 500 and 600 council houses a year. He should go back and read that document before he throws out inaccurate figures.

Des McNulty also said that we are battering into GHA, which is completely inaccurate. I do not

know where he gets that from. We understand that a problem exists between the two sides in the argument, which is why we are trying to bring them together to discuss the issue.

I agree with other members that Bill Aitken made a thoughtful speech. On SST, four housing associations have submitted business plans and we hope that they will move forward in the near future. Many in my party shared his concerns about the large-scale stock transfers.

Rhoda Grant said that £25 million of investment in housing was derisory and talked as if that were the only investment in housing, which is absolutely not the case. The real figure for investment is more than £1.5 billion over the next three years. The £25 million is but a small part of our overall investment.

Duncan McNeil and several other members talked about the figures. I will give the Parliament the completion rates for social rented housing in the previous Administration's term. In 2003-04, the figure was 3,654. In following years, the figures were 4,414, 5,074 and 3,325. The total was just over 16,000, which is about 4,000 a year. The figures that others quoted were farcical and incorrect.

I hope that many members will back the momentum behind SST and accept that we are open minded about the process for the way forward. I hope that members recognise that, in "Firm Foundations", we have a policy position that the sector has widely welcomed.

The situation is difficult with the moneys that are available from the Westminster Government—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister must conclude.

**Stewart Maxwell:** However, we must drive forward to ensure that we have maximum efficiency from the sector. I commend my amendment to Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Margaret Curran, who has nine minutes.

11:31

**Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** Oh—nine minutes. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Jim Tolson made an entertaining speech in which he quoted an answer from Stewart Maxwell. Stewart Maxwell gave another woeful performance today and we look forward to more interesting answers when we interrogate his figures.

It is clear to members why we initiated a debate on housing and why—unusually—we went for a longer debate. Members understand that we did that deliberately to interrogate the many complex

and challenging housing issues and, as many members have said, because of the minister's persistent refusal to acknowledge key issues and answer significant questions. I give the minister fair warning that we will come back to housing again and again because it is our job to do that and because he is required to provide those answers. I will go through some of the issues, because answers are still needed.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Ross Finnie said that the Government has been in office for one year. We had the first housing debate in June last year. "Firm Foundations" was issued in October. The consultation ended in January and we have published the analysis of consultation responses. We will come to the chamber with detailed proposals for the future of housing policy very soon.

**Margaret Curran:** As members behind me have said, there is no rush, minister.

The debate has been good and has allowed us to interrogate in depth significant issues, particularly in relation to GHA, on which we have heard interesting comments. I will say something that I have never said before in the chamber and which I will be shocked to say again: Alex Neil made a useful and interesting speech. I do not intend to say that again. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Margaret Curran:** Thank you. Alex Neil's speech was interesting, because we are beginning to see a hint of SNP back benchers pushing the Government a wee bit further and encouraging it to take a more radical stance. I congratulate Alex Neil on that.

The GHA issue is important and I associate myself with the comments of Robert Brown and many others on it. It is only fair to put on record our acknowledgement of GHA's many significant achievements in improving housing standards in Glasgow. That matters to tenants in Glasgow.

I am pleased that we have finally seen the end of the black hole argument, which has been put to bed.

Johann Lamont raised one outstanding question for the minister. Way back in a debate that the SNP introduced, the cabinet secretary promised to consider the suite of Government funding to GHA and extract commitments from that. Perhaps the minister will share that information with the Parliament.

An important point that has emerged in the debate is that concerns are felt throughout the chamber about housing issues. Those concerns are not going away and the Government needs to pursue them. It is deeply disappointing that, any time that a member comes here to raise an issue

that is of concern among constituents or stakeholders, it is dismissed as scaremongering or moaning. Frankly, it is beneath the Government to dismiss as scaremongering every issue of concern that is raised with ministers. It is time to put an end to that.

There has been substantial recognition of the achievements of the previous Executive on housing. I hope that people such as Bill Aitken recognise that we tried to move beyond partisan politics to create consensus around housing. Most independent assessors would say that we delivered a strategic and coherent approach to council housing.

**Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP):** The member argues that the previous Executive put forward a strategic plan that was supported. However, it did not deliver on housing, which is why we inherited a housing crisis from that Government.

**Margaret Curran:** It is completely disrespectful to the chamber for Tricia Marwick to walk in here at the end of a debate and intervene. That is against all parliamentary practice. Perhaps if she had been here for the debate she would have understood some of the arguments that have been put forward.

The amendments that have been lodged by the Lib Dems and the Tories, as well as the Labour motion, reflect a shared concern across the chamber about the Government's failure to recognise the range and depth of the concerns that are being expressed about housing. It is not acceptable for the minister—who is clearly not listening to me—to dismiss that as moaning and a partisan view. He has refused to acknowledge any criticism of "Firm Foundations". If he will stop having a private conversation and listen to me, I will tell him about some of the concerns that have been raised.

There is concern about the lack of connection to regeneration, which is a serious flaw in his proposals. Real concerns have also been expressed about the lead developer role and about the way in which the minister is managing the efficiencies that he has proposed. For example, as he will know, housing associations are at the cutting edge of driving environmental efficiencies in housing; yet, his efficiencies will squeeze out what is being done to address those real concerns.

The real frustration is the fact that the minister will not engage in proper debate in the chamber. He knows that there is concern throughout Scotland—which we have articulated—about his failure to announce the housing association grant and concern that he will not match the £501 million of funding that we made available in our last year

in government, and yet he will not acknowledge those concerns. We all know that he is going to drop the first-time buyers grant because it is—and always was—a daft policy, but he is timing that announcement to suit the SNP rather than to address the needs of Scottish housing. Frankly, that is not acceptable.

The concerns are growing throughout Scotland. As we have heard, in Edinburgh there are real issues around investment, affordability and supply. In the Highlands, Renfrewshire and Stirling the SNP told people to vote against the stock transfer. What does the SNP say to those tenants about their housing needs now? How is the Government going to drive up the housing quality standard? How do we advance and remodel housing for those with specialist housing needs? How do we plan housing for our very old citizens, as Lord Sutherland's report has suggested? How do we respond to Shelter's call for an independent assessment of the homelessness reform programme?

During the debate, the minister—who is still not listening—was specifically asked to address the 2009 target and the call from Shelter to examine that, but he has not. As Ross Finnie entertainingly put it, the minister is calling on himself to produce a coherent policy. Tricia Marwick appears to have left the chamber again, so I cannot address her, but it seems that SNP members realise that they do not have a coherent housing policy if they have to lodge a motion calling on themselves to produce one. Does the minister think that, if the motion is agreed tonight, he will be under some obligation to produce a coherent housing policy?

The SNP has too easily dismissed the achievements of the previous Executive. If the minister is going to be a proper housing minister, he should address the needs of the people of Scotland rather than engage in party-political game plans. He should not stand on the sidelines as he has done. He should lead Scotland, as we did, on issues from homelessness to warm homes; from high levels of investment to the reform of the planning system; from tenant empowerment to meeting aspiration throughout Scotland; and from our islands to our inner cities. Jim Tolson was right: it is *déjà vu*, and real questions have gone unanswered. What kind of Scotland is Stewart Maxwell bringing us into? What kind of housing policy is he creating? At the back of my mind is the thought—my God!—that Alex Neil would make a better housing minister than Stewart Maxwell.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

11:40

#### Air Discount Scheme

**1. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it will review the operation of the air discount scheme. (S3O-3184)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** We reviewed the air discount scheme between August 2007 and January 2008. The European Commission accepted our subsequent request to continue the scheme for another three years from 1 April 2008.

**Karen Gillon:** Did the minister's review flag up the anomaly within the scheme that it discriminates against parents who do not live with their children on the islands and whose children are too young to travel alone to the mainland? I accept that only a very small number of parents will be in that position and that there will be a small cost to the Government. However, the issue impacts on the relationship between parent and child and the ability of some parents to fulfil their access provisions. Will the minister meet me to discuss what options are open to him to resolve the matter and enable parents in that situation to benefit from the air discount scheme when they make access visits to their children?

**Stewart Stevenson:** I know the member's interest in the subject and respect absolutely what she says. She touches on a real problem. There are provisions in the scheme whereby, if one parent lives on an island in one of the areas where the air discount scheme applies, that parent is entitled to buy tickets for their child. I would be happy to meet the member to discuss whether there are any practicable and affordable ways in which we can address what is an important issue for a small number of people.

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** I welcome the minister's comments on the matter. Does he expect the renewal of the air discount scheme to lead to an increase in the number of passengers who use Highlands and Islands airports?

**Stewart Stevenson:** There has been a substantial increase in the number of people who use air services to our remote and fragile communities, and there is every sign that we will continue to see growth in such traffic. That is a

good indicator of the support that the Government continues to provide—as the previous Administration provided—to our remote communities, which are an important part of Scotland.

#### Housing Associations (Glasgow)

**2. Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing last met representatives of housing associations in Glasgow. (S3O-3180)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Government is committed to engaging with all stakeholders in Glasgow to deliver successful and sustainable communities. The Minister for Communities and I meet Glasgow Housing Association regularly, and we have each met local housing associations both formally and informally. The minister has also met the local housing organisations' chairs forum and the Glasgow and west of Scotland forum of housing associations.

**Margaret Curran:** I will press the cabinet secretary for more detail. Could she tell me specifically when she last met housing association representatives? She will realise that the Mazars report is the subject of significant discussion in Glasgow, and I am sure that housing associations will want to put to her directly the evidence that they have accumulated. Does she agree with Alex Neil, who said this morning that the response of sending the report to the regulator is not good enough and that it should go to independent scrutiny so that we can be sure that the evidence has been properly assessed?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I confirm to Margaret Curran that I agree with Alex Neil on all matters—he will be pleased to hear that. The Minister for Communities said, in the debate that we have just had, that the Government has, rightly, asked the Housing Regulator to look at the Mazars report. We take the report very seriously and want to ensure that it is properly scrutinised. When we have the report in its final form, we will publish it, and any further decisions will be made on the back of that. In the meantime, I repeat the encouragement that Stewart Maxwell gave to the GHA and the other interested housing associations to continue to discuss these matters.

I hope that everybody in the chamber will join me in welcoming the progress towards second-stage transfer that we are now seeing. I agree with Johann Lamont's comment this morning—although it is perhaps the only comment that she made with which I agree—that second-stage transfer continues to be a difficult issue. However, we should all welcome the prospect of the first

ballots for second-stage transfer taking place over the next 12 months. I hope that nothing that anybody has said in the debate or does after the debate will put that in jeopardy.

On Margaret Curran's first question, I meet housing association representatives from my constituency regularly. The last meeting was with representatives of the Southside Housing Association.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** When the cabinet secretary meets housing associations in Glasgow to discuss the Mazars report, will she work with them to make sure that those that are ready to go to second-stage transfer and which might be paying inflated valuations are not held up by any review of the Mazars study?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I want the progress of the past few months to continue. All 16 of the local housing organisations in the first tranche of second-stage transfer will submit proposals between now and October—indeed, some have already done so. I hope that the first ballots will take place within the next 12 months. That is considerable progress, in contrast with the lack of progress in the years following the GHA transfer.

On the Mazars report, I have said previously and I am happy to say again that it is important to ensure fairness for all tenants, whether they are transferring or not. I believe that the GHA wants that and I am confident that it is what housing associations want. We will ensure that the Mazars report is properly scrutinised and that the results of that scrutiny are made public. We will take the matter forward on that basis.

### Advanced Higher

**3. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what commitment it has to advanced higher following its announcement on national qualifications. (S3O-3189)

**The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt):** The Scottish Government is committed to the future of advanced higher, as underlined by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in her statement to Parliament on 24 April 2008. The Government considers that advanced higher

"will continue to play an important role both in ensuring that our most able learners have an appropriate level of challenge and in securing the status of S6."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2008; c 7866.]

**Hugh Henry:** The minister will be aware that concerns are being expressed in the Renfrewshire Council area about the threat of cuts in the availability of advanced higher in the coming academic year, including in my constituency. Will she join me in urging Renfrewshire Council to guarantee that, in the coming academic year,

there will be no diminution of the availability of advanced higher?

**Maureen Watt:** As the member is a former education minister, he will know that it is the responsibility of individual schools and local authorities to determine the delivery of qualifications in response to local circumstances and their students' needs. That is as it has always been. The provision of advanced higher in the Renfrewshire Council area depends on the individual schools. This year's arrangements are exactly the same as they were in the past. The advanced higher on offer will depend on the choices that students make, and that will then determine the consortium arrangements across the Renfrewshire Council area.

**Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** What discussions are taking place with education bodies in Scotland to ensure that all pupils who wish to study for the advanced higher have the opportunity to do so, even if it means taking advantage of courses in neighbouring schools or in the independent sector?

**Maureen Watt:** Schools use many innovative systems in order to offer increased provision of subjects. For example, the SCHOLAR programme, which was developed by Heriot-Watt University, provides the opportunity for pupils to take advanced higher in several subjects through computer-based learning with support from teachers. With the continuing uptake of the glow project, such arrangements will be rolled out. There are innovative ways in which students can study for a range of advanced higher.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Can the minister say categorically that no school will have to withdraw advanced higher or reduce the number of advanced higher that are on offer to students because of funding cuts? If that is the case, will she confirm that there will be more presentations for advanced higher in Scotland in the coming academic year than there were in the previous one?

**Maureen Watt:** The rate of pupils staying on for secondary 6 has remained broadly consistent in recent years. The uptake of advanced higher has also remained consistent. The Scottish Government has increased the budget to local authorities by 5 per cent, 4.1 per cent and 3.4 per cent in the next three years. As I said in my response to Hugh Henry, it is the responsibility of individual schools and local authorities to determine how they manage and deliver qualifications.

### Falkirk Council (Meetings)

**4. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Minister for

Communities and Sport last met with representatives of Labour and Conservative-led Falkirk Council. (S3O-3229)

**The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell):** I have not met any representatives of Falkirk Council.

**Michael Matheson:** Although the minister has not met any representatives of the Labour and Conservative administration, he will be aware that it has decided to abandon the indoor football arena that was to have been built at the Westfield stadium in Falkirk. Having secured £3 million through the national and regional sports facilities strategy, the council has chosen to tear up that £3 million cheque. Does he agree that such a facility would have been of significant benefit to the local community and to the wider area? Does the situation not demonstrate the hollowness of the claims and calls that come from the Tories and the Labour Party for more sports facilities, given that when they can deliver such facilities, they choose to tear up a £3 million cheque that would have allowed them to do so?

**Stewart Maxwell:** The member used the word "hollowness" and that is at the heart of the decision. The fact is that £3 million was available. It is unfortunate that the project will not now go forward, as I understand it, although I have yet to receive formal notification from Falkirk Council. It will be very disappointing for the people of Falkirk. It is for the local council to decide on its priorities; clearly, it has decided that this project is not one of its priorities.

#### **Council Houses (North Lanarkshire)**

**5. Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many council houses have been built by North Lanarkshire Council since 1996. (S3O-3226)

**The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell):** The latest data for which new build figures are available show that North Lanarkshire Council built 30 council houses in the period between the first quarter of 1996 and the third quarter of 2007. All 30 of those new properties were completed in 2001.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the minister join me in welcoming North Lanarkshire Council's announcement that it is investigating the possibility of building 150 new council houses? Does he agree that that is a result of the Government's policy of restricting the right to buy on any new social housing? What further benefits for a new generation of council housing does he foresee as a result of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's recent announcement of additional funding to assist local authorities in building new council homes?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I welcome the proposals for 150 new council houses in North Lanarkshire. As was said in this morning's debate, North Lanarkshire and a number of other councils have suddenly decided that they will build or propose to build new council houses. That is clearly connected to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's announcement about our proposals to invest an additional £25 million to kick-start a new generation of council house building, and to abolish the right to buy for new-build properties, thereby guaranteeing that they will stay in the social rented sector. Those twin announcements are at the heart of the sudden changes that we have seen in councils' attitudes to building houses.

The further benefits are fairly obvious. We will begin to tackle the supply problem, although it will take us some time to do that. We will have new houses in an area with a landlord that the local people want. They are council tenants and they want to stay council tenants. Local people will be pleased when the new council house building programme gets under way in the next few years.

#### **School Building Programme (Edinburgh)**

**6. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on Edinburgh's school building programme and whether more money is needed before progress on Portobello high, Boroughmuir and James Gillespie's schools can begin. (S3O-3183)

**The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt):** The City of Edinburgh Council has statutory responsibility for the provision and maintenance of school buildings in its area. Questions regarding investment priorities and the allocation of resources for individual schools are matters for the council.

**George Foulkes:** The minister must recall her written answer to me that confirmed that, after more than a year in office, no building of new schools has started, apart from those that were already in the pipeline under the Labour Administration. I know that the minister has had discussions with the Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrat-led council about Portobello high school in particular. Will she say now how that school's new building will be funded and when building will start? She has a responsibility to the Parliament to give us an answer now.

**Maureen Watt:** As I said, that is a matter for the City of Edinburgh Council. The city council has been given £202 million in capital funding over the next three years, which is made up of £70 million this year, nearly £67 million in 2009-10 and £65 million the following year. The council can use those capital moneys for school buildings if it so wishes. We said that we would match the previous Administration's plans for school buildings and we

must find the money to deliver that. Since May 2007, we have signed off seven projects, delivering 45 schools. Schools are being built throughout Scotland. We know that, by the end of this session, around 250 schools will have been delivered under this Government.

#### **Broadband (Highlands and Islands)**

**7. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has made to secure full broadband coverage across the Highlands and Islands. (S3O-3207)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** We have made great progress with our project, which aims to bring affordable broadband to all eligible Scottish businesses and households that notified us of an access problem. We have received state aid approval for the £3.4 million of Government-funded procurement, which has now entered its final stage of discussions with a preferred supplier. We expect to sign a contract in June, with solutions being delivered over the course of this year from that point.

**Peter Peacock:** I welcome the progress that the Government has promised, which builds on the progress that was made under the previous Administration. I thank the minister for the letter that I received earlier this week, which covered some of the issues. However, will he accept that I am still receiving representations on the matter from across the Highlands and Islands, including from the Black Isle, which is very close to Inverness, a big urban centre, and from parts of the Western Isles, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Skye, Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey and Moray. Those areas, or parts of those areas, remain without broadband coverage or have inadequate broadband capacity. Will he go further today than he has hitherto been able to go and offer a definite commitment to those people who are still registering for broadband that they will get the same Government support as those who have already registered?

**Jim Mather:** I think that the member is recognising what is a good-news story. We have listened to many members as they have raised the issue. We have raised awareness. We have 3,500 registrations. The work is happening, and in a crisp, businesslike fashion. We have cleared the state aid hurdle. On late registrations, the initial statement was that we were closing registration on 18 January. We did not; we have kept it open, and we will keep it open continuously through May before the contract sets in June. We will then deliver affordable solutions from the good suppliers that we have attracted. The contract will be awarded next month.

#### **Interisland Ferries**

**8. Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what importance it places on small interisland ferries. (S3O-3236)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** The Scottish Government acknowledges the crucial role that small interisland ferry services have in ensuring that the remote communities that are served by them have access to essential goods and services and connectivity to onward destinations.

**Dave Thompson:** At present, the national concessionary fares scheme extends only to bus fares. Given the commitment of the Scottish Government to supporting fairer transport costs, will the minister look into the potential benefits of extending the scheme to all small interisland ferries?

**Stewart Stevenson:** The member will be aware that the concessionary fares scheme provides some support for ferry passengers in the Western Isles and elsewhere. We are reviewing the national scheme this year, and the issue that the member raises is one of the things that we will consider.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Before we move to First Minister's questions, I remind members to stay behind at the end for an official photograph for the Parliament's annual report. The photograph will be taken here in the chamber, not on the steps down to the garden lobby, as was previously intimated.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Engagements

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** I call Wendy Alexander. [*Applause.*] Order.

**1. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-740)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Later today I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland. I am looking forward to the first question. To coin a phrase, bring it on.

**Ms Alexander:** The First Minister has been a nationalist all his political life. I am giving him the opportunity to resolve this issue. Why will he not take it?

**The First Minister:** Let me acknowledge the progress that Wendy Alexander has made over the past week. She now accepts the right of this Parliament to decide the future, in terms of a constitutional referendum put to the people of Scotland. We also have the Duncan McNeil declaration on behalf of the entire Labour group:

"we will not vote down any referendum bill that comes into the Parliament."

So when we bring forward that bill—

**Members:** When?

**The First Minister:**—knowing that the Labour Party will support it—

**Members:** When?

**The First Minister:** As stated in our manifesto—in 2010. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** We will expect the support of every Labour member in the Parliament. Given the progress that Wendy Alexander has made in the past few days, who knows what side she will be campaigning on?

**Ms Alexander:** This is far too serious a matter to jest with. We believe that the uncertainty is damaging Scotland. I and my colleagues have therefore offered our support to bring the issue forward now. We believe that Scotland deserves a choice sooner rather than later. The First Minister tells us that more than 80 per cent of Scots want a referendum—so why are we still waiting?

**The First Minister:** If Wendy Alexander will allow us, I thought that we would stick to what was in the Scottish National Party's manifesto on

pages 8 and 15. Week after week, Wendy Alexander comes here and demands that we stick to the SNP manifesto—she attacks us for not doing so. However, that is not working, because people love the progress that we are making on so many issues. Now she is telling us that we should not stick to the manifesto and the 2010 date. Does she not feel that her credibility on keeping manifesto promises is being somewhat damaged by the process?

I agree with Wendy Alexander that this is a serious process, which is why we are engaging with it in a serious way through the national conversation. However, it is impossible for anyone outside the Labour Party—and I think most people in it—to take the Labour Party seriously after the past few days.

**Ms Alexander:** I have no doubt that the judgment of history will be between those, such as me and my colleagues, who wanted to let the people speak and those who wanted delay in order to foment grievance—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Ms Alexander:**—and to fray the relationship, because they feared the result.

The uncertainty is damaging our country. Uncertainty costs jobs. Last night Iain McMillan of the Confederation of British Industry Scotland said that it was time to lance the boil.

I have offered Labour's support for an early referendum. The First Minister has spurned that offer. Why will he not bring the bill on?

**The First Minister:** I welcome the upsurge in support for a referendum from Iain McMillan and everyone else. I also noticed in *The Scotsman* on Friday a poll of 648 business people around Scotland, which found that a total of

"39 per cent were now more in favour of independence than 12 months ago"

and that

"57.5 per cent believe that the SNP was doing a good or excellent job in power"—

a majority of three to one. The business community of Scotland, looking at the SNP in action, is warming to independence just like the rest of the country.

As the national conversation proceeds, with the declared committed support of every Labour MSP—with the possible exception of Karen Gillon—we will bring forward the legislation. We will go into the referendum and Scotland will vote for independence and freedom.

**Ms Alexander:** I am not the problem. Labour is not the problem. The legislative timetable is not the problem. Even Nicola Sturgeon is not the

problem this week. The First Minister is the problem when it comes to resolving this issue in the nation's interests.

The First Minister will make a statement next week on his programme for government. The question is simple. Will he bring forward a referendum bill in next year's legislative programme, which he will announce next week?

**The First Minister:** The answer is that we will stick to what was laid out in pages 8 and 15 of the SNP manifesto. I would not say that Wendy Alexander is the only problem that the Labour Party has, but after the past few days we can decide quite convincingly that she is not the answer.

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

#### 2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):

The First Minister met regularly with the Rev Ian Paisley, who is now departing from office. He met regularly with Bertie Ahern, who has now departed from office.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-741)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** I met the Prime Minister a week past Monday. He assured me that he intended to stay in office, but he gave no similar undertaking about the Labour leader in Scotland. Of course, I did my best to act as a peacemaker between the warring factions in the Labour Party.

**Annabel Goldie:** George Robertson famously said that devolution would kill independence "stone dead". Well, Gordon Brown and Wendy Alexander are now doing their damndest to warm up the corpse. Who would have thought that a Labour Prime Minister and a Scottish Labour leader would be the SNP's greatest allies in breaking up Britain? The future of Scotland in Britain may not matter to the Labour Party, but it matters to David Cameron and it matters to me and to those millions of people in Scotland who want devolution to work. The Labour Party may have abandoned them, but the Conservatives have not.

Does the First Minister accept that, whatever his views about his political opponents, a referendum on something as important as the constitutional future of Scotland—a country that we all love—cannot be allowed to become a vote on the unpopularity of Gordon Brown and Wendy Alexander? That is an unacceptably dangerous road to take.

**The First Minister:** Having laid out a process as well as a date of 2010 in our manifesto, by staying faithful to that we are not being tempted by narrow political advantage to take advantage of the

unpopularity of Gordon Brown and Wendy Alexander. Of course, Annabel Goldie's comments have a great deal of sense given the disarray of the Labour Party, but there is an essential question that she should perhaps clarify. Does she accept the right of the Scottish people in a referendum to determine their constitutional future?

**The Presiding Officer:** Questions are for the First Minister.

**Annabel Goldie:** I am here to ask the questions, First Minister. Whatever turmoil has raged over the past four days, devolution is what we have and I am confident that it is what we shall continue to have.

Does the First Minister agree that the politics of grudge, gripe and grievance between his Government and Gordon Brown's Government is unattractive, unimpressive and negative? Does he agree that with the exciting prospect of a general election—yes, bring it on—the time has come to construct a new relationship between Scotland's two Governments? The Conservatives are committed to that. Is he?

**The First Minister:** I point out to Annabel Goldie that just two weeks ago, during the possible fuel disruption, which could have had extraordinarily damaging consequences for the Scottish economy, this Government worked together with the Westminster Government to mitigate and to take Scotland through that difficulty. We did the same during the foot-and-mouth outbreak and following the terrorist attack on Glasgow airport. We have demonstrated that, where necessity demands proper co-operation, we are able and willing to give it.

However, Annabel Goldie must accept that there are legitimate differing views on the constitutional future of Scotland. The Government will put forward its view on independence and freedom for the Scottish people. There are also issues of current political concern, such as the withdrawal of attendance allowance because the Parliament decided to pursue a policy of free personal care. I hope that when we pursue those issues at Westminster, as we must, and stand up for Scotland, we will have the support of every party in the chamber, and that our doing so will be regarded not as the politics of grudge and grievance but as the politics of Scotland.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**3. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-742)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

**Nicol Stephen:** Can the First Minister believe his luck? Over the past year, he has seen the Conservatives cosy up to him, backing his budget and supporting him in key votes. Through thick and thin, for better or for worse, they were his best friends—until this week, when the farcical floor show that passes for the modern-day Labour Party came into view, offering the First Minister on a silver tray the vote that he has spent his previous 30 years in politics trying to achieve. With Labour and Tories like that, does he think that life can get any better?

**The First Minister:** I do not know how much luck comes into politics, but I have heard it observed that the luckiest thing that happened to the SNP over the past year was Nicol Stephen's decision not to go into coalition with us.

**Nicol Stephen:** With all this going on, will the First Minister guarantee to spend time on the serious issues that people face this week? What detailed steps has he taken to respond to the humanitarian disaster following the cyclone in Burma last weekend? What discussions has he had with the Scottish charities and agencies about co-ordinating their work, as happened after the Indian Ocean tsunami? Is he liaising with the Disasters Emergency Committee? Have any Government staff been seconded to assist? Has Scottish Water been able to help by offering supplies of bottled water to those with no fresh water, as it did after the tsunami? Has the Government any plans to set up a one-stop shop for individuals who wish to assist? Has he written to the Burmese Government to offer support? How much time has he had this week for the people of Burma?

**The First Minister:** We are taking forward the suggestions that Nicol Stephen makes, especially with the Disasters Emergency Committee. In our international policy, we have declared that the Government stands ready to help. This is a humanitarian disaster on a global scale. We will co-ordinate our work with that of the Disasters Emergency Committee. I will take forward every suggestion by all parties in the chamber to enable Scotland to come to the aid of people in distress internationally.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will take a constituency question from Cathie Craigie.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** The First Minister will be aware of the announcement by Barclaycard yesterday that it will enter into a consultation process on proposals to close the Goldfish operation in Cumbernauld, which provides employment for more than 900

skilled workers at a state-of-the-art facility that delivers banking-related services. I am sure that the First Minister appreciates the devastating effect that the announcement has had on the workforce and the problems that it will create in the economy of Cumbernauld and of Scotland as a whole. What action will the First Minister take to protect those jobs and to secure them in Cumbernauld?

**The First Minister:** I have spoken twice in recent weeks to the managing director of Barclaycard, because we realised the danger that its takeover of Goldfish earlier this year posed to the operation in Cumbernauld. Unfortunately for us, Barclaycard has spare capacity in its operation—it is a much larger operation than Goldfish was. As Cathie Craigie will know, it has announced a similar process at the Goldfish headquarters in London.

There are two good reasons for optimism for the workforce in Cumbernauld. First, as Cathie Craigie rightly said, we are talking about a skilled workforce in a purpose-built facility. We now have the opportunity to market that facility to other providers in Scotland. Secondly, as part of our negotiations with Barclaycard, we pointed to the substantial increase in employment at Barclays Wealth in a facility in Glasgow that was declared open last autumn. Indeed, I was at the opening. Barclaycard has agreed to see where it can intermatch its expanding employment in Glasgow and the skills of those who might be made redundant in Cumbernauld.

We will work extremely hard, using all our agencies, to find positions for the people who work in the Cumbernauld facility. I will be delighted, as Jim Mather will be, to meet Cathie Craigie on this constituency issue.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will take a further constituency question from Stuart McMillan.

**Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware that the Clyde marine pilots are involved in industrial action with Clydeport over a variety of issues, including safety concerns and a new contract that the pilots think is less than satisfactory. He may also be aware that Clydeport recently advertised in Poland for pilots, stating that

"previous experience of piloting would be advantageous".

In light of that, will the First Minister open a channel of discussion between Clydeport and the Clyde marine pilots? Until now, Clydeport has refused to answer numerous calls and letters, including a registered letter, from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, which is trying to facilitate talks.

**The First Minister:** Let us declare from the outset that we all wish that the two parties in the dispute would use the facilities of ACAS. I am familiar with some of the issues in the dispute because they were relevant to issues that arose in the fuel dispute of the past few weeks. Both parties—Clydeport and the union that represents the pilots—should use the offer and facilities of ACAS to come to terms and resolve the dispute, which could be obviously extremely damaging for free travel in the Clyde ports.

#### Fuel Prices

**4. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what representations he has made to the Prime Minister about the impact of high fuel prices on the road haulage industry and the economy of Scotland in general. (S3F-747)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** I wrote to the chancellor on 10 March asking him not to implement the planned increases in fuel duty and to introduce a fuel duty regulator and commission a study of road haulage costs in Britain in comparison with costs in the rest of Europe. A reply is still awaited.

I call again on the Westminster Government to introduce a fuel duty regulator, which would provide double protection for motorists and the road haulage industry. First, higher oil prices beyond budgetary forecasts would trigger an automatic freeze in fuel duty rates. Secondly, any extra cash that was raised from VAT on petrol or diesel as a result of the higher pump prices would go back into an equivalent cut in fuel duty.

A fuel duty regulator softens the blow of unexpected spikes in oil and fuel prices, and the proposal is well worth consideration. I saw an interview with the Prime Minister this morning in which he seemed to indicate that he understood people's concerns about the rising cost of so many things. The fuel duty regulator is a taxation measure that, in this new and more contrite atmosphere, the Prime Minister and his chancellor would do well to consider.

**Brian Adam:** I welcome the First Minister's answer. Does he share my concern that increased fuel prices—particularly increases that result from additional taxation—are helping to fuel inflation? Will he deploy that argument in any future correspondence with the Prime Minister?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I will. With oil prices at \$120 a barrel and vast oil revenues flowing from Scotland to the London Treasury, the irony for Scotland is that our economy, particularly in the peripheral parts of the country, is damaged severely by high fuel prices. It is extraordinary that a country that produces such massive revenues in oil and gas wealth should be subjected to such

disadvantage at this time. We have given the Treasury a range of suggestions to mitigate the effects of the price rises. I hope that the Prime Minister and the chancellor will avail themselves of at least one of them.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD):** The First Minister will be aware that fuel prices in the Highlands and Islands have long outstripped prices elsewhere in Scotland. In my constituency, where diesel is now approaching £1.40 per litre, the impact on not only businesses but every household is severe.

Will the First Minister therefore welcome the commitment that United Kingdom Treasury ministers have given to my colleague Alistair Carmichael to investigate why the cost of fuel in the Highlands and Islands remains much higher than the cost of fuel in the rest of the country? Will he tell the Prime Minister about his Government's support for such an investigation, which could include, if necessary, the involvement of the Office of Fair Trading? Subject to the findings of that investigation, will he press for urgent action to help bring fuel prices in Orkney and throughout the Highlands and Islands more in line with prices in other parts of Scotland?

**The First Minister:** I agree with all the points that the member makes, but there is one thing that I should caution him about. I remember the previous investigation that was commissioned along those lines, which did not, unfortunately, produce any governmental results. However, that is no reason for not trying again, so I support the member's request to lend my backing to such an investigation. It is clear that the Highlands and Islands area is among the most vulnerable areas in respect of transportation costs. Industries in those areas bear the heaviest burden of all.

#### Scottish Futures Trust

**5. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister, following the recent publication of the responses to the Scottish futures trust consultation, what the next step in the process will be. (S3F-759)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The responses to the Scottish futures trust consultation are currently being carefully considered. The Cabinet will take a decision on the next steps shortly, and an announcement will be made following that.

**Andy Kerr:** The Bank of Scotland has said:

"there is a clear danger that the Scottish Futures Trust could prove to be a more expensive method of delivery than we already have."

Accountants and others have confirmed that. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has said

that the Scottish National Party does not have the necessary powers, and regeneration consultants are baffled as to why any private investor would get involved in the scheme.

In addition, Audit Scotland has said that it is not aware of any new school building programme, and has called on the Government to produce a financial strategy for how it intends to fund new schools.

When will the Government produce such a strategy? Will it initiate any new schools? Will it build 100 new schools by 2009 and another 150 by 2011, to match Labour's promise brick for brick, or is it the case, as ever, that talk is cheap and the lives and futures of our children are even cheaper?

**The First Minister:** Actually, Audit Scotland said that there had been no strategy in the Labour-Liberal Government to develop its school programme. That is why we have a strategy. Incidentally, of the 44 schools that we have signed off in our first year of government, which Maureen Watt mentioned earlier, it is an enormous pleasure to say that the building of no fewer than 14 of those new schools involved non-profit-distributing companies. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** I am sure that Andy Kerr welcomes that, just as I welcome the offer that was made in the consultation on the Scottish futures trust by Labour-led East Renfrewshire Council, which wants to pilot the scheme. That is the sort of co-operation with local government in Scotland that the concordat results in.

Among the many interesting submissions that have been made in the futures trust consultation, I noticed in particular one from Anderson Strathern, which is a well-regarded company that is deeply involved in private finance initiative and public-private partnership schemes, which are so beloved of Andy Kerr. It said:

"it is recognised that, in certain projects, the private sector have made profits at a level that was not anticipated by the public sector."

Those profits were certainly not anticipated by Andy Kerr when he was in government.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Will the First Minister ensure that, under the Scottish futures trust, there will be no repeat of what happened at Hairmyres hospital, which is in Andy Kerr's constituency? [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Alex Neil:** There, the PFI company put in £100 million in equity and got in return £89 million in dividends. In other words, we got one hospital for the price of two.

**The First Minister:** If Alex Neil and Anderson Strathern recognise what is happening, Andy Kerr will eventually recognise it, too. I am sure that Alex Neil and at least some Labour MSPs welcome the announcement that has been made on the biggest single investment in the history of the national health service in Scotland in its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary year—I refer to the public finance for the new Southern general hospital. As I said to the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Nye Bevan will be cheering us on.

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):** Can the First Minister confirm that, according to the plans that are set out in his consultation document, the futures trust that would build and own all the schools and hospitals is a private company?

**The First Minister:** Yes—it follows the NPD model, which is a substantial advance on the model that was supported by the Labour-Liberal Administration and which resulted in the concession of inflated profits by so many providers.

We must remember that the PPP model beloved of Labour and Liberal members was considered to be an improvement on the PFI model beloved of the Conservative party, which was even more expensive to the public purse in Scotland.

### Peak Oil

**6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister what the impact of peak oil will be on Scotland and what action the Scottish Government is taking to address the issue. (S3F-751)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** On a global level, there has been considerable debate about whether peak oil has occurred. We should remember that significant reserves remain in the North Sea and that the Scottish oil and gas industry, which is of enormous economic importance to Scotland, will remain a vital sector of our economy for decades to come.

However, we are also clear that Scotland needs to make a transition to a low carbon economy, with an energy supply that is diverse and sustainable and which contributes to Scotland's wealth. The Scottish Government is determined to take a global lead in such a transition—the 80 per cent CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target in the forthcoming climate change bill makes that clear. That is a challenging target, but I am sure that it will have the support of Patrick Harvie and his colleague.

**Patrick Harvie:** The 80 per cent CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target certainly has our support and we eagerly await the detail of the proposal. However, it addresses a different, although equally pressing, issue.

Last week, for the first time the Parliament agreed to a motion that acknowledged the reality of peak oil, which will have significant long-term economic and environmental consequences around the world. The First Minister mentioned North Sea oil, but I am sure that he is aware of recent figures that show that it is declining faster than ever—last year alone, it declined by 14 per cent.

Even if Wendy Alexander manages to deliver independence for Scotland, we face the prospect of becoming a net importer of oil when prices would be beyond the \$200 a barrel mark.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Patrick Harvie:** Does the First Minister therefore agree that Scotland remains quite unprepared for the reality of peak oil? Will his Government take on the responsibility of returning to Parliament with a clear programme of action for steering a transition towards a low carbon economy that is fit for life after peak oil?

**The First Minister:** I must make a correction: Scotland produces more than 10 times its consumption of oil and gas, and will remain a net exporter for decades to come.

There is a strong argument that we might have passed the peak of North Sea oil and gas production, but we are certainly far less than halfway into the economic effects. When the price of oil is \$120 a barrel, one does not have to be an economist to realise that we are nowhere near halfway into the economic impact. The challenge for us, of course, is to get more of the economic impact in terms of revenues for the Scottish people over the next 30 years than we have managed to get over the past 30 years.

Peak oil is a substantial issue, globally, so I know that Patrick Harvie will welcome initiatives such as the saltire prize, which is the world's largest single prize for offshore renewables generation. That initiative, which was launched last month in Washington, in conjunction with the National Geographic Society, shows that Scotland has had a major second win in the energy lottery when it comes to our renewables potential. Our marine renewables potential might account for 25 per cent of that for the whole of Europe.

That is the sort of ambitious plan that talks to the future of this nation. Let us hope that we manage to secure more of the benefits of our second win in the energy lottery than we did from our first win on oil and gas.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Despite the fact that 20 new fields came on line last year, overall our production has almost halved from its high in

1999. This year, the number of new field start-ups is set to be two rather than 20.

Does the First Minister agree that if exploration is not positively encouraged by both the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments, hydrocarbon production in the UK sector could come to an end much sooner than most people realise, causing great damage to our economy, especially in Aberdeen and the north-east?

**The First Minister:** I think that there will be significant quantities of oil and gas in the waters around Scotland for generations to come. However, I agree that calculated and systematic exploration incentives are extremely important, which is why I put them forward in a series of proposals for the budget two years ago. They would have cost a bare fraction of the additional taxation that the chancellor is raking in at the present moment.

As the member will know from his knowledge of north-east Scotland, it is a question not just of exploration incentives but of infrastructure incentives. For example, there are no plans for development of 20 gas fields that have been discovered off the west coast of Scotland because they need a shared infrastructure.

The investment incentives that are required need to be carefully targeted; they will cost a bare fraction of the increases in oil taxation. With those in mind and with a Government that is passionate about the industry and infrastructure of Scotland, we can be confident that the oil and gas revolution will continue in our country for decades to come.

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Wind energy must be a part of meeting our future energy needs. Can the First Minister confirm that, in the first 12 months of his Administration, his ministers have approved major wind power developments with a combined capacity of under 600 megawatts, while they have rejected major wind power applications with a combined capacity of approaching 900 megawatts?

**The First Minister:** Lewis Macdonald did not mention that one of those rejections was of a single project in the Western Isles. We will shortly be celebrating a renewable energy capacity in Scotland of 3 gigawatts, which is far beyond our capacity in nuclear power, for example.

As we move forward, with applications already in for another 4 gigawatts, with the potential to produce perhaps five or even 10 times Scotland's electricity requirements from the renewables revolution that lies before us, I am sure that even Lewis Macdonald will conjure up some enthusiasm for participation in the saltire prize for marine renewables and that he will encourage the great technologists at the University of Aberdeen and the Robert Gordon University to move in for the

prize as Scotland becomes the world centre of energy from offshore marine renewables—the energy of the future.

14:15

*On resuming—*

12:32

*Meeting suspended until 14.15.*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Rural Affairs and the Environment

##### Scotland Rural Development Programme (Small Farmers and Crofters)

**1. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what assistance is available for small farmers and crofters in the Highlands and Islands who wish to access funds from the Scottish rural development programme. (S3O-3187)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** I am sure that the member will be delighted to hear that small farmers and crofters in the Highlands and Islands will have at least as much, and perhaps more, access to funding than other rural businesses. They will be eligible for rural development contracts for regional priorities, rural development contracts for land managers' options, forestry challenge funds, LEADER funding, the food processing, marketing and co-operation scheme, less favoured area support and the crofting counties agricultural grant scheme; that is, seven out of the eight elements of the Scotland rural development programme. Even the eighth element of the programme—the skills development scheme—may support organisations to set up a training initiative to benefit crofters.

**Rhoda Grant:** The minister will be aware that small crofters and farmers are the backbone of rural communities. This Government has cut funding to the crofters and farmers who take seriously their environmental obligations. It has prevented many of them from applying for alternative funding through the Scottish rural development programme by excluding those who cannot apply online. In the meantime, those who form themselves into groups can get assistance from the Crofters Commission and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and those who can afford it can buy assistance in applying, but—again—the most needy will suffer. What is the minister going to do about that problem?

**Michael Russell:** I am going to try to be positive about all the opportunities that exist. I am sorry to say that Rhoda Grant appears to take a glass-half-empty view of life.

I have discussed these issues at length with the Scottish Crofting Foundation and others, and know that they are aware that the opportunities are

great. The way to take advantage of those opportunities is to encourage people to apply, not to say that funds have been cut when they have not been cut, and to look at the potential and the possibilities of the scheme. If Rhoda Grant were to do that, I am sure that the mood in the Highlands and Islands would be brighter than her own.

### Flooding

**2. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the call by the Association of British Insurers, what plans it has to stop developments designated as being at high risk of flooding across Scotland. (S3O-3181)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** This is clearly an important issue for Helen Eadie. She will recall that she and I discussed flooding earlier this year and that she is due to meet me again next Thursday. In March, she asked seven written parliamentary questions on flood risk and coastal planning, and I have previously answered two oral parliamentary questions from her on the subject. Next week, we are due to provide answers to a further 38 written parliamentary questions on the subject. This is an issue that is dear to her heart. More specifically, it is also near to her home.

Turning to the substance of the question, Scottish planning policy 7 includes a risk framework that sets out the planning response to developments that are proposed in areas of high flood risk. The Association of British Insurers was a key consultee during its preparation and fully endorsed the risk framework approach.

**Helen Eadie:** The minister might not know, but I live a good 40 minutes' walk from the particular site in question. The development that we are discussing was recommended for refusal on one occasion by the local authority and was about to be recommended again for refusal when the Scottish Executive's reporter said that it would be approved.

The minister needs to look at the photographs that I sent to him earlier this week, which show that houses, flats and a bistro are about to be built on an area of infill land that is at high risk of flooding. The photographs provide a shocking and devastating account of that. It will be on your watch, minister, that those homes are placed at risk.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Could we have a question, please?

**Helen Eadie:** I ask the minister to study carefully, when he meets me, the photographs that I have sent you and that you consider withdrawing the approval for building permission.

**The Presiding Officer:** I was not planning to meet you, Ms Eadie, but I am sure that the minister will answer accordingly.

**Michael Russell:** I admire persistence wherever it is shown. However, persistence should not fly in the face of facts. For example, many of the written parliamentary questions that have been submitted by the member on the subject reflect planning and flooding issues and the language and legislation on planning and flooding that apply south of the border, but not in Scotland. They do not show a sound understanding either of the Scottish position or of the issue. I am sorry to say that. I am also sorry to say that the purpose of the question is exactly what the chamber has just heard—to try to spread alarm and despondency where there should be none.

The effect of section 48(6) of the Town and County Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 is that once a reporter has issued a decision on an appeal, that decision is final. Neither he or she, the Scottish ministers, nor anybody else has any further jurisdiction on the matter. That means that it is not possible for the Scottish ministers, the appointed reporter, or the directorate for planning and environmental appeals to comment on the merits of the appeals, other than to say that the reporters' decisions were based on the evidence that was presented at the public local inquiries, and on all written submissions by the parties involved. That is the fact of the matter.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I declare an interest. The minister has outlined his views on the need not to build on flood plains when doing so is avoidable, as outlined in SPP 7. Given the need once again to maximise food production from our best land, can he outline what measures the Government will take to incentivise farmers both to grow food and to allow flood plains to again be used as natural flood defences?

**Michael Russell:** That is a good and pertinent question and it needs to be dealt with in the context of the report of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, of which John Scott is the deputy convener. It should also be dealt with in any consideration of the flooding bill, and be taken into account in the bill itself. I do not think the amount of land in question is as large as some people have claimed. However, the way in which we encourage land managers and landowners—and tenants of land—to ensure that that land is available for sustainable or natural flood defences is a key issue. I look forward to a constructive engagement on that issue with Mr Scott and with the chamber.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Does the minister believe that there should be an obligation on developers that are building in areas where there might be a risk of flooding to

disclose what the flood risk is as part of the assessment process, and to give people a clear indication of the degree of security they might realistically expect?

**Michael Russell:** That is also a positive approach, which has been mentioned and discussed in committee. In principle, I would welcome that approach. It is important that there is full disclosure, but we must remember that indicative flood maps are indicative and are not, in fact, an indication of the likelihood, or possibility, of actual flooding in any property. There are issues to be considered, but in general I would welcome that approach. I hope that it will be something the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee reflects upon, after which we will see how we can bring it forward in terms of legislation.

### **Environmental Justice (Local Authorities)**

**3. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with local authorities about the issue of environmental justice. (S3O-3193)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** The Scottish Government has not had any discussions with local authorities specifically on that issue.

With her background, I am sure that Johann Lamont will recognise that the concept of environmental justice is widely embracing and is now largely mainstreamed across a range of policies. A discussion in that context takes place regularly.

The concordat that has been agreed between the Government and Scotland's local authorities—in particular our joint endeavour to deliver our national outcomes—will lead to the steady extension of environmental justice to all sections of our society.

**Johann Lamont:** Does the minister acknowledge the anxiety in some quarters that environmental issues are viewed as a rural rather than an urban issue? That is despite the fact that urban areas such as the one that I represent have suffered disproportionately from environmental depredation—large-scale and due to living with the consequences of, for example, disorder. Will the minister confirm whether the environmental justice budget still exists, which was introduced to address that matter? What funding is available to address environmental issues in urban communities, and what share of the environment budget is directed at dealing with communities that have to live with bad-neighbour development?

**Michael Russell:** I agree with Johann Lamont that environmental injustice and degradation is an urban as well as a rural issue. More people are probably affected in urban areas than in rural

areas, which is why attention must be paid to it as part of the general activity that we undertake under a whole range of matters, including waste, transport, housing improvements—as Johann Lamont mentioned—quality of life improvements, regeneration, green space, flooding, health issues, how decision making takes place in communities, and learning. We are addressing the issues in all those areas.

Funding of £2 million was provided in financial year 2007-08 for the environmental justice scheme. We will provide funding totalling £18.8 million over the next three years for the climate challenge fund, which will be directed firmly towards communities. It will support mechanisms that will be put in place to ensure that communities that have a limited capacity to engage will be able to become involved.

### **Environmental Impact Assessments**

**4. Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what criteria determine whether an environmental impact assessment should be undertaken. (S3O-3238)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** The amended EIA directive 85/227/EEC sets out projects to which the directive applies.

Projects of the types listed in annex I must always be subject to environmental impact assessment. Projects of the types listed in annex II, as I am sure the member is aware, must be subject to environmental impact assessment whenever they are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

**Sandra White:** The minister will be aware of the proposed development by Tesco at Partick in Glasgow, which attracted over 1,000 objections and a request by Glasgow City Council that an EIA be carried out. It was refused. Is the minister aware that the plans for the development were changed and resubmitted on numerous occasions? Does he agree that if substantial changes are made to development plans, a fresh EIA should be sought?

**Michael Russell:** I am sure that Sandra White will appreciate that it is impossible for me to be drawn on individual planning issues and that it would be unwise. In general, I make it clear that it would be unwise for this minister to be so drawn—as it has always been unwise for previous ministers—although it is a pity that Labour members do not seem to recognise that.

The reality of the situation is that being a good neighbour in a general sense means that one should be sensitive to the opinions of those with whom one will be situated. Therefore, providing information on environmental impacts would be good and neighbourly practice for any developer

whose development was meeting significant opposition.

### **Glasgow Airport (Noise Impact)**

**5. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has had discussions with the United Kingdom Government with regard to bringing in regulation at Glasgow airport aimed at reducing the noise impact on residents living under the flight path. (S3O-3234)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** I acknowledge Gil Paterson's long-standing interest in the matter and his effective work with the people who are affected.

In the context of the EU environmental noise directive, the Scottish Government has had extensive discussions with the UK Government about noise from airports. Under the terms of the directive, the major airports, including Glasgow international airport, are required to produce action plans designed to manage noise issues and effects. The draft action plan for Glasgow airport is due to be published for consultation shortly. The member will note that I also met the UK Noise Association to discuss those and other issues on 25 March 2008.

**Gil Paterson:** Most people who live in and around airports appreciate that there will always be noise at airports. When the British Airports Authority was privatised, the right of regulation of Scottish airports went to that private company, although the Government accepted regulation of London airports. Many people feel that self-regulation is not effective.

Will the Scottish Government talk to the UK Government and use its influence to bring regulation of Scottish airports—Glasgow airport in particular—under Government control? Action might then be taken and some respite from the noise granted, as has been the case around London airports.

**Michael Russell:** The member raises a good, interesting but complex issue. There is no evidence that noise at Glasgow airport exceeds the 66dB level, which is regarded as the level that would trigger the need for mitigation measures, such as insulation schemes. That evidence would be needed before any such scheme could be considered. As far as we are aware, no residents live in a contour above the 66dB limit.

Some airports are designated under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 to take measures to control aircraft noise—Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports are the only three in the UK that are so designated. The other airports are not designated. A wide range of circumstances are taken into account, of which noise level is the principal one.

No formal criteria exist for designation—each case must be considered on its merits.

The Scottish ministers have the power to designate airports in Scotland. I am willing to discuss the issue with Gil Paterson, within the confines of what I have said, and bearing in mind that Glasgow international airport has put in place measures to reduce noise. The latest set of contour maps for the airport, which were produced in 2007, show that noise levels have fallen compared with 2002 and 1990. Modern quieter aircraft are part of the reason for that.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** One concern of people in areas—such as Whitecrock, Drumry and Linnvale—of my constituency that are particularly affected by aircraft noise is that noise monitoring is based not in the areas that are most directly affected, but further away. Will the minister consider that? Will he also consider the times of flights? One issue that concerns people is that flights are starting earlier and ending later, with more weekend flights. Those changes are part and parcel of the disruption that affects people in those areas of Clydebank and in a substantial number of other areas in my parliamentary constituency.

**Michael Russell:** Des McNulty is right to draw attention to the matter, because noise is a considerable pollutant to which we must pay strong attention. The Government is strongly taking forward work on the effects of noise pollution. We have undertaken noise mapping in advance of the rest of the UK. The Glasgow airport maps are produced independently of the airport operator, so we should have some confidence in them. However, I am happy to meet the member to discuss how monitoring can be stepped up. I presume that he is in constant touch with BAA and individual airlines to ensure that concerns are addressed. The Government expects aircraft and airport operators to achieve a reasonable balance between their legitimate operations and the interests of those who live nearby and who are affected by noise pollution.

### **Environment**

**6. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how its policy decisions will improve the environment. (S3O-3186)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** Through successfully delivering our greener strategic objective, we will improve Scotland's natural and built environment and our sustainable use and enjoyment of it.

**Charlie Gordon:** Can the minister say, from the corporate point of view, how the Scottish Government proposes to offset the environmental

effects of recent policy decisions? For example, we all know that de-tolling the Forth road bridge will cause an increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Are such issues considered in the round?

**Michael Russell:** They are considered in the round, closely and thoughtfully. All our actions must be judged on the basis of our policy objectives. We aim to have a greener Scotland, to ensure that we have not just economic growth, but sustainable economic growth and to meet the ambitious targets that we are setting, for example, on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. I know that Mr Gordon will be a strong supporter of all the Government's actions that are making absolutely certain that we meet those objectives, and we welcome him on board in undertaking that task.

### Sustainability

**7. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how its environmental policies are improving Scotland's sustainability. (S3O-3212)

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** The Scottish Government's overall purpose is

"To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth."

In the 2007 Scottish budget and spending review document, which I seem to recall Karen Whitefield did not vote against, we set out how a greener Scotland will play its part. Work includes focusing spending on reducing our impact on our local and global environment; protecting and enhancing our natural and built environment; making much better use of our substantial renewable energy resource; reducing climate change emissions from transport, housing and business; and improving Scotland's record on waste management and recycling. Through pursuit of those and other complementary policy initiatives, we will improve Scotland's sustainability.

**Karen Whitefield:** I am grateful to the minister for his fine words—I expected nothing less than fine words from him. However, does he agree that the Government must do more than talk a good game and that it needs to act and show leadership. Does he regret the Government's decision to abolish the Cabinet sub-committee on sustainable Scotland? Is not it a further matter of regret that the First Minister has failed to show leadership on the issue or to follow the example of the previous First Minister, who chaired that sub-committee and ensured that sustainability was at the heart of Government and all its policy decisions?

**Michael Russell:** I am sure that the member will not take it amiss if I quote Edith Piaf and say, "Je ne regrette rien."

This Government is delivering on every one of the objectives that I included in the spending review. The Government's actions and words go together and we are showing leadership. For eight years, leadership was invisible in the Governments that were supported by Karen Whitefield. It is now highly visible. I find very difficult to understand why anybody can imply that the present First Minister is invisible. Given all those circumstances, I suggest that the sustainability of my answer is considerably greater than the sustainability of the very shaky question that the member asked.

### Justice and Law Officers

#### Forensic Science Services

**1. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what further consideration it is giving to the future provision of forensic science services. (S3O-3214)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** I understand the concerns that the member and others have raised, and I am grateful to them for doing so. I want everyone to understand and support our reasons for moving forward before we do so. The provision of forensic science services is the responsibility of the Scottish Police Services Authority, but the Scottish Government's approval is required for major capital investment. I have approved the SPSA's proposal for a much-needed new forensic laboratory in Dundee. Let there be no doubt that that will transform the quality of forensic science available to the Scottish police service.

I have asked the SPSA to look again at the proposed integration of the Aberdeen and Dundee laboratories; to look at the implications of that for the provision of forensic services to Grampian Police and Northern Constabulary; to engage in fresh consultation with interested parties; and to let me have further advice. I want there to be the fullest opportunity for everyone to contribute their views and to understand the arguments for and against. In the meantime, no decision will be taken to close the Aberdeen forensic laboratory.

**Brian Adam:** I am sure that the staff at Aberdeen are as grateful as I am for that answer.

Considerable concerns have been expressed about the lack of consultation before the business plan was submitted to you. Will you publish the business plan so that others can examine it? Can you assure us that the consultation that you have announced will be thorough, will involve the staff, and is not a fait accompli?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that I can do none of those things, Mr Adam, but I suspect that the minister might be able to.

**Kenny MacAskill:** I am aware of complaints and disquiet about the way in which the consultation has been carried out. I expect the consultation to be full, open, transparent and meaningful.

As regards other documentation, unless information is commercially confidential, it should be available so that everyone can see that appropriate decisions are being made by what is, after all, a publicly funded body.

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's decision to ask the SPSA to consider the matter again. He will recall that I first raised the matter with him in February, and he will recall that he told me in a written answer on 14 April that—on its proposal to close the forensic science laboratory in Aberdeen—the SPSA had consulted

"staff, unions, police authorities, Chief Constables and regional procurators fiscal".—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 14 April 2008; S3W-11133.]

Will the cabinet secretary now publish the responses to the consultation? If not, why not?

**Kenny MacAskill:** It seems to me that the offer of full, frank and new consultation is perhaps much more to be welcomed than an offer to go back over old ground. I can see no reason why some responses should not be available.

We should be looking at matters afresh, to ensure that everyone who has a contribution to make, and everyone who has a clear involvement and locus, has an opportunity to be heard.

I am aware of the disquiet expressed by Mr Macdonald, Mr Adam and others. I am anxious that we should consider matters afresh. Members have received an undertaking from the Government that—as I said at the outset—the consultation will be full, frank and transparent, involving all appropriate parties. It would be better to move forwards than to spend our time looking backwards.

### Open Prisons

**2. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether there are any plans to expand Scotland's open prison estate. (S3O-3248)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** As I confirmed on 22 November 2007, there are no plans to expand Scotland's open prison estate. However, the open estate remains an important part of the Scottish Government's penal policy.

**Mike Pringle:** The minister is aware of the problems that are faced by long-term prisoners on release from prison and their undoubted contribution to Scotland's high reoffending rates. He is also aware that 75 per cent of people who are sent to prison for six months or less reoffend within two years, whereas only 42 per cent of those who are given community sentences do so. Will the minister consider making greater use of the open estate as a halfway house to reintegrate long-term prisoners into society and, in so doing, to cut reoffending rates? Moreover, does he believe that there is a need for more open prison places and agree that more use should be made of community sentencing to free up the open estate?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The member raises a variety of points, many of which I agree with. I reiterate that we have no plans to expand the current open prison estate. However, following an internal review by the Scottish Prison Service, there is now a substantial capacity in the estate that no doubt will be considered in due course. Moreover, the McLeish commission is examining whether the SPS and the open estate are operating appropriately.

However, as the member correctly points out, the Government believes that the open estate forms a valuable part of how we rehabilitate people into the community. As all the evidence clearly suggests, if we simply release a person without making any attempt to rehabilitate or to reintegrate them, they are very likely to be back to see us again very soon. That serves neither us nor our communities well.

That said, we agree with Mr Pringle and the Liberal Democrats about community sentencing. Prison should be for serious or dangerous offenders. Instead of funding free bed and board for those who commit less serious offences, we should ensure that they repay with the sweat of their brow the damage that they have done to their communities.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** Although there is unanimous agreement in the Parliament that the open estate plays a definite role in the prison system, does not the minister agree that it would be absolute folly to extend the number of open prison places before a full inquiry has been held into the criteria that are used to send people from the closed to the open estate?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The member's position is very wise. Back in November, I told Mr Aitken's colleague Mr Fraser that we had no plans to expand the open estate. Nothing has changed since then.

The fact is that the prison estate's capacity has not yet been fully utilised. We are trying to work

out why that should be, but it appears that, following the tragedy of the Robert Foye case, some of the criteria have quite correctly been changed. That is understandable. After all, the Government made it quite clear that the SPS had to review the situation; it has done so and is now implementing many changes to ensure, for example, that there are proper risk assessments. The service is also on the case with regard to reintroducing dedicated governors to our two open estate prisons—an issue in which, I have to say, it was rather remiss.

### Women in Custody

**3. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that the dignity of women in custody is upheld. (S3O-3209)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** Dignified treatment of women prisoners is essential. As we said recently in the chamber, the Government finds the handcuffing of pregnant women unacceptable. In addition, the Scottish Prison Service has put in place a variety of specific policies to ensure the proper treatment of female offenders.

**Dr Simpson:** As the cabinet secretary pointed out, at last week's First Minister's question time, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing said unequivocally that

"the handcuffing of pregnant women in hospital"

was

"absolutely unacceptable".—[*Official Report*, 1 May 2008; c 8177.]

However, that night, the director of the SPS, Mike Ewart, said on "Newsnight Scotland" that it could still happen in exceptional circumstances.

Moreover, in a written reply to an earlier written question of mine, Mr Ewart said that women would be unhandcuffed to hold or feed their babies. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need to instruct the SPS to cease these practices in relation to pregnant and newly delivered women? If so, he will certainly have my full support.

**Kenny MacAskill:** I welcome Dr Simpson's comments and am aware of his long-standing interest in and actions on this issue. Indeed, I hope to build on that work.

I do not think that there is any difference between the attitude of and comments expressed by Mr Ewart as chief executive of the SPS and the Deputy First Minister's comments. The SPS has made it clear that it does not accept such actions and does not wish to see them occur. In many cases, such incidents have happened as a result of instructions given by Reliance.

However, there are exceptional circumstances. Of the prisoners in Cornton Vale, 50 per cent have self-harmed, 98 per cent have a drug or alcohol addiction, 70 per cent present with mental health issues and 60 per cent report various instances of abuse. Sadly, there are occasions on which it is necessary to prevent prisoners from harming themselves. I have been told by Mr Ewart and others of cases in which a prisoner has threatened to harm their child. Such cases are few and far between, but there are exceptional circumstances in which it would be negligent not to ensure the safety of the prisoner and their unborn child. Indeed, as Richard Simpson knows from his past experience as a practitioner, there are circumstances in which it is also necessary to protect medical staff from people who may present a danger not just to themselves but to others.

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** The Equal Opportunities Committee took evidence recently on female offenders in the criminal justice system; the Lord Advocate was among those from whom we heard. One issue that was raised was that the fact that community service orders were designed more for men than for women makes it extremely difficult for women to carry them out. Will the cabinet secretary examine that issue, with a view to making CSOs much more suitable for women?

**Kenny MacAskill:** That is a valid point. Some steps have been taken, including the setting up of the 218 centre, but it is clear that many of the standard community service schemes are geared towards young men, who make up the majority of the people who commit crime and fill up our courts. We must ensure that suitable disposals are available for women who offend. As I said in reply to Dr Simpson, many female prisoners have underlying mental health or substance abuse issues, and they may require treatment more than they require punishment.

However, we must remember that many female prisoners have committed offences that must be punished. We must ensure that the appropriate disposal, whether that is a treatment order or a punishment order, is available to the sheriff or judge so that they can make the correct decision, thereby helping to rehabilitate the offender and make our communities safer. We will make offenders better citizens if we allow them to repay the damage that they have caused.

### Firearms (Consolidation Bill)

**4. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made on a consolidated firearms bill. (S3O-3232)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** We held a very successful firearms summit yesterday, at which a range of key

interests was represented. It was clear that an overhaul of firearms legislation is long overdue. I regret that the Home Secretary did not attend the summit, even though she was invited to do so. I will write to update her on the summit's findings.

However, legislation alone will not solve the problem. Over the summer, we will work collectively on an information campaign to highlight the dangers of firearms in our communities.

**Stuart McMillan:** I am pleased that the summit appears to have been constructive and that the issue of how to rid our streets of illegal guns and of the reported 500,000 air weapons that are in circulation is being considered with a sense of urgency.

The cabinet secretary is aware that weapons are not necessarily an isolated problem but can be tied up with the drugs trade, as the drugs raids that Strathclyde Police carried out last Friday in Inverclyde demonstrated. He has said that he will communicate with the Home Secretary. Will he stress to her that new legislation is necessary, regardless of whether Scotland acts as a pilot area? She must understand and realise that there is a problem that needs to be tackled.

Will the cabinet secretary provide further information on the activities that will take place this summer?

**Kenny MacAskill:** As regards the primary subject of the question, the summit made it clear that the current legislation, which is dealt with on a pan-United Kingdom basis, is no longer fit for purpose. Evidence from serving police officers of significant rank and from the judiciary showed that, in many instances, the law is, frankly, incomprehensible and requires to be overhauled. We will make that clear to the Home Secretary.

As the member correctly identified, it is clear that there is a significant link between the use of more serious weapons and serious crime. That said, I do not seek to downplay how dangerous air weapons are, given the number of tragedies that have been caused by them. The parents of Andrew Morton were present at yesterday's summit. Those of us at the summit were briefed by police officers on the link between guns and serious crime. Dealing with the issue is largely down to sophisticated police intelligence, and to the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency and our police forces working in co-operation with forces south of the border and—given that weapons come in from a variety of sources—on the European continent. The issue is being tackled.

In the campaign over the summer, we will work on a cross-party basis across a variety of agencies. The campaign will remind people of

their responsibilities and obligations, and of the dangers of firearms and what might happen to them if they abuse them.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** I welcome the constructive nature of yesterday's summit at Bute house. I believe that, despite our differences of opinion with the Government, it was a constructive dialogue, and I hope that it will continue. I also welcome the Home Secretary's commitment to listen to the outcome of the talks.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is important to establish what impact the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 has had, particularly on the requirement for air-guns to be sold by licensed dealers? How does the Scottish Government intend to collate information on whether the 2006 act has resulted in a reduction in the sale of air-guns, given that there is anecdotal evidence that that is the case?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Pauline McNeill raises a valid point. If memory serves me right, she raised that point at the summit, and I recall that the Government gave an undertaking to work out the information to which she referred. Obviously, some changes have been introduced only recently. However, I think it was agreed at the summit that the number of outlets selling air-guns is not substantial and that the justice department should be capable of doing a phone-round. I reiterate my undertaking to carry that out, and we will seek to share the information across the parties. We will also seek to draw that information to the attention of the Home Secretary.

The member is correct that the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 has made changes. However, the Government believes that the changes do not go far enough. I remind Pauline McNeill of the views of senior police officers and members of the judiciary that the current firearms legislation that has been built up since 1968 was often introduced in reaction to great concern about events that took place at Hungerford and Dunblane, for example, which is understandable. However, firearms law is not as good as it should be, and it is no longer appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I ask Pauline McNeill to consider joining me in reiterating to the Home Secretary that, for that reason alone, we require a consolidated act that is appropriate. If that is a pan-UK act, the Government is more than happy to say: so be it.

#### **Strathclyde Police (Meetings)**

**5. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Justice last met the chief constable of Strathclyde Police and what issues were discussed. (S3O-3202)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** I last met the chief constable of Strathclyde Police on 25 April at the Scottish Police College, where we attended the passing out parade for the first 52 additional police officers funded by this Government. That is proof, if proof were needed, that this Government, in partnership with local authorities, is delivering on its commitment to recruit 1,000 additional police officers during this session of the Parliament.

**Des McNulty:** I draw the minister's attention to an incident that happened last Monday, in which a woman was stabbed for 50p by a beggar outside a pub. That is another instance of the random violence, involving the use of a knife in this case, that is becoming an increasingly major problem not just in Glasgow city but throughout Strathclyde. There were five murders in Glasgow last weekend. We must find a way forward to tackle that situation.

It is all very well talking about 50 new police officers across Scotland, but there must be not only additional police on the streets, but Government co-ordination to address the real problems that affect the lives and freedoms of people in our major city. Will the minister consult his Cabinet colleagues and try to focus on how we can address the issue in a serious, non-partisan way? The incidents that we have seen in the past few days are completely unacceptable.

**Kenny MacAskill:** Absolutely. I cannot comment on the specific matters to which the member refers, but every such incident, whether a murder or a stabbing, is unacceptable and a tragedy.

I reiterate that we are committed to recruiting 1,000 new officers; even more than that will be available and visible on our streets as a result of retention and redeployment. We must build, on a non-partisan basis, on the violence reduction strategy that was initiated by my predecessor, Cathy Jamieson. We must intervene early and we must change the culture of alcohol abuse. There is no simple solution to the problem that we face. It is a problem not only in the city of Glasgow, but the length and breadth of Scotland. For example, I observed on a website that a tragedy occurred up in a more rural part of Highland Scotland. We must deal with such matters.

If there were a simple solution, it would have been found by previous Governments. However, I confirm that this Government will build on the correct attitude that was taken by Cathy Jamieson in seeking to intervene early, address the booze-and-blade culture that we have in Scotland and provide tough enforcement. Our courts and—as the Lord Advocate made clear to me—the Crown view that culture as unacceptable. They have a zero tolerance approach to it and are being tough

in the implementation of the legislation. We must have a variety of approaches, and I welcome the member's commitment. As a society, we must resolve this issue.

#### **Offenders (HM Prison Inverness)**

**6. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to rehabilitate offenders before and after their release from HM Prison Inverness. (S3O-3224)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** HM Prison Inverness provides a range of measures that respond to prisoners' assessed needs and promote and support more constructive lifestyles on release. Such measures challenge offending behaviour and develop employability skills and social responsibility.

**Rob Gibson:** After the unannounced full inspection of the prison on 5 to 9 November 2007, it was recommended

“that the delivery of interventions to address offending behaviour is reinvigorated, and that a systematic and planned approach to the delivery, in suitable accommodation, is introduced.”

Will that be possible in the prison budget and will it be delivered soon?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The problems that are faced by Inverness prison are faced throughout the prison estate. We have an excellent prison service in Scotland, which deals with difficult and often dangerous people in circumstances that are often exceedingly challenging. Until we can get control of prison numbers, and allow the prison service to focus on its requirement to protect our citizens from the danger of prisoners escaping and ensure that prisoners seek to be rehabilitated, there is a limit to what can be done.

I reiterate that the staff and governor of HM Prison Inverness are doing extremely well in difficult times. They are working with organisations in the public sector and beyond to ensure that there is a route out of prison for those who are caught up in it.

## Effective Public Services

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1849, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on effective public services.

14:57

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford):** Scotland's public services have a vital role to play in achieving this Government's central purpose of a more successful Scotland with increased sustainable economic growth. We value the work that is done by the dedicated and hard-working staff in the public sector. I take the opportunity to make clear our commitment to the future of public services in Scotland—a commitment to deliver a public sector that is simpler in structure and organised in a way that eliminates complexity, duplication and overlap; that is integrated in its approach to delivering public services through a focus on shared strategic outcomes; that is trusted to deliver those outcomes in a way that benefits from flexibility in approach and makes best use of knowledge, specialism and expertise; and that operates within clearer governance and accountability arrangements, reflecting a strong and positive relationship between Government and its public bodies.

We will deliver effective public services that are easier and quicker for people and businesses to deal with, thereby improving outcomes for Scottish people, improving our country's competitiveness and producing substantial savings in the wider economy. If those changes can raise the productivity of Scotland's private sector by just 1 per cent, the increased benefit to Scotland's economy will be around £800 million.

In reforming Scotland's public bodies, our overall approach is first, to streamline decision making and increase transparency by extending our outcome-based approach to public bodies; secondly, to bring together organisations with similar skills, expertise and processes, and to deliver a 26 per cent reduction in the number of national public sector organisations by 2011; third, to stop activity that no longer contributes to the public purpose; and fourth, to apply much tougher tests to the creation of new bodies.

I will update the chamber on our progress since the First Minister's statement on 30 January, which set out the changes that we will progress to reshape and simplify the public service landscape. Making those long-overdue changes will produce the greater cohesion and integrated focus between public bodies that is much needed for the successful delivery of shared outcomes, and will

open up opportunities and synergies to public service delivery. The package will also make a significant contribution to the efficient government efficiency gains of around £25 million that are required from the bodies that the changes affect directly. The savings will be made available to support improved services. Because we value the contribution and commitment of staff, we have guaranteed that there will be no compulsory redundancies.

What have we achieved so far? Last autumn, we published a comprehensive baseline of 199 public sector organisations. In April 2008, the list had already reduced to 168, which is a reduction of 31 organisations. Five of those are the first fruits of our simplification programme, which has delivered 10 per cent of our overall target reduction of 52 organisations by 2011. That is a significant start in reshaping our public services, but we have more to do.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** Will Bruce Crawford clarify whether 32 of the organisations that he just mentioned were the justice of the peace advisory committees?

**Bruce Crawford:** Indeed they were. The Liberal Democrats suggested that they be abolished, but we have implemented the proposal and will do a lot more than the Liberal Democrats did. I will come to the Liberal Democrat position shortly.

We will report on our progress on reducing the number of public bodies as part of Scotland performs, which will be launched in the coming weeks and will report on Scotland's and the Government's performance against the purpose, outcomes and indicators that are clearly set out in the spending review.

We have been open about the task forces and other short-term groups that have been established to tackle specific issues. I am disappointed that some members have intentionally sought to confuse short-term groups—set up to involve and engage with stakeholders on specific issues—with appointed public boards and established public organisations that employ staff and deliver public services. *[Interruption.]* Andy Kerr was one of the worst culprits. Let me be clear: we are delivering simpler public services through slimmer Government structures with fewer departments, fewer ministers and fewer public organisations. Simpler structures will support the delivery of better outcomes for individuals when they access public services and for businesses that engage with public organisations.

The move towards outcomes represents a fundamental shift in the approach to the delivery of public services and demands new relationships

across the public sector. We have put in place the historic concordat with local government—

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** House!

**Bruce Crawford:** I know that Andy Kerr loves historic concordats.

The concordat is clearly focused on the delivery of agreed outcomes that are based on our strategic objectives.

We will now extend the approach to the wider public sector and build a relationship with our public bodies that is focused on delivering alignment in promoting the Government's agenda. There will be greater clarity that public bodies are directly accountable to the Scottish ministers for their work and the taxpayers' money they spend.

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** I am with the minister on much of what he has said. However, he said that he would outline the progress that has been made since the statement in January, so will he be a bit more specific about it?

**Bruce Crawford:** I am more than happy to give Gavin Brown some updates, and I will come to them. In fact, why not do it right now?

The Scottish Building Standards Agency and Scottish Agricultural Science Agency were merged into the Scottish Government in April. Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate for Scotland was abolished in March. The creation of Skills Development Scotland brought together the Scottish University for Industry, Careers Scotland and most of the skills and training functions of the enterprise networks to provide a much more focused and integrated approach to delivering for Scotland.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Will the minister give way on that point?

**Bruce Crawford:** I am afraid that I have lots to say.

We also decided not to establish the Scottish civil enforcement commission that the previous Administration announced. We have abolished Communities Scotland as a separate agency and brought its main non-regulatory functions into the core Scottish Government. We have transformed the enterprise network and are delivering on the Government's housing and regeneration priorities to boot. We are doing plenty.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the minister give way?

**Bruce Crawford:** No. I will turn to the Liberals' amendment before I give way again.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** You have one minute left, minister.

**Bruce Crawford:** The Liberal amendment refers to the previous Administration's attempts to reduce waste and bureaucracy. The reality is that rather than reduce bureaucracy and duplication, it made an industry out of creating new bodies: 21 new non-departmental bodies, employing 8,000 staff and holding budgets totalling £380 million, were created between 1999 and 2000. A further eight new Scottish Government agencies were created in the same period. Taken together, those agencies have an administration budget of around £65 million, with around 1,200 staff and a total spending power of £2.2 million.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** Will Mr Crawford give way on that point?

**Bruce Crawford:** Unfortunately, I am into my last minute.

I turn to the Labour amendment. Labour's hypocrisy knows no bounds. It votes for the Scottish Government's local government finance order in Parliament, but then does nothing but moan, groan, whinge and whine about the supposed impacts, which it has either imagined or is deliberately misleading people about. The reality is that any resourcing problems were caused by years of mismanagement by Labour in Scotland's councils and by in-fighting here between Labour and the Liberals in the previous Administration.

We will be judged on our results in delivering public services. Those results will be collected and made visible for the first time through the publication of our performance information. We will deliver better outcomes for the people of Scotland, Scotland's businesses and Scotland's economy, which will serve this Government's core purpose of increased sustainable growth.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the opportunity to debate proposals to deliver better public services by reducing duplication, bureaucracy and overlaps in the public sector with the aim of achieving greater focus and alignment with the Purpose of Government and the outcomes set out in the national performance framework.

15:06

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** I say to Mr Crawford that all Governments seek to reduce bureaucracy and overlaps in services and to ensure that services are integrated; it is not exclusive to the Scottish National Party Administration. One has a chequered view of the past if one does not acknowledge some of the great strides taken by the previous Administration.

Changing the way that we do things in public services is not about swallowing the Jim Mather lexicon of managementspeak but about working to generate a change in the culture in our public services. I worry that the methodical approach that

the SNP is taking to balancing budgets in not just the Scottish Government but councils will not deliver any of the desired outcomes to which Mr Crawford referred. I will expand on that point in due course.

Mr Crawford accused me and others in the chamber of hypocrisy. That is ironic, coming from a member of an organisation that picks up the previous Administration's ideas, dresses them up as its own and then presents them to the Parliament as belonging exclusively to it.

Robert Brown was quite right to intervene on the point about abolishing the 32 justice of the peace advisory committees, which was the previous Government's policy. At First Minister's question time, the First Minister tried to take credit for the non-profit distributing model for public-private partnerships, which Falkirk Council and Argyll and Bute Council are now pursuing. That was utter nonsense, because I signed off the model many years ago. It is the SNP's hypocrisy that knows no bounds.

We will get to the concordat in a few minutes. The SNP has taken a motherhood-and-apple-pie approach in its motion. It will be meaningless to compare it against the performance framework and it will be difficult to ensure that the aims are delivered.

Through the modernising government fund, for example, the Administration of which I was part sought to ensure that our public services worked together. Providing such direct investment to support radical cultural change in our public services remains a far more effective approach than simply stacking up statistics in a document such as "Efficiency Delivery Plans 2008-2011", and sub-contracting £1 billion of savings to the national health service and £1 billion of savings to local government and saying, "Get on with it."

As we know—[*Interruption.*] That ain't my phone. In communities throughout the country, the so-called efficiencies that are being made are, in fact, cuts in public services.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** On local authority efficiency savings, will Mr Kerr give credit where credit is due to the local authorities that, throughout the period of the efficient government programme under his Administration, exceeded expectations about the savings that could be made? Why were efficiency savings acceptable under his Administration but are somehow unacceptable under this Administration?

**Andy Kerr:** I think I started my speech by saying that it was the shared desire of all Governments and Administrations to ensure that efficiencies are delivered.

On the fiscal climate and the change made by the historic concordat—Mr Swinney features in many press cuttings about this—we are seeing cuts, not efficiencies, in local authorities.

Many years ago, I was involved in the Labour Party's development of best value to ensure that we got rid of the hated compulsory competitive tendering regime, which sought to denude local authorities of any decision-making powers. CCT was about the value of nothing and the price of everything in public services.

Best value has ensured that a substantial change has been made, which has allowed our local authorities to develop their current services. Whether we are in opposition or government, I am happy to reward and recognise the work of many local authorities, the national health service and public sector organisations—quangos and all—because they have tried to make efficiencies. As I said, that argument is not exclusively the property of the SNP.

The modernising Government fund resulted in some substantial differences—I am not sure whether it still exists under the new SNP Administration. The fund drove changes such as the smart card systems and other new technologies that were implemented. That resource was used to ensure that public services worked together. That is how to make changes in public services. The tick box, or the credit and debit sheet, that the SNP is adopting may be doomed to some degree of failure.

We must not forget the added value that public services bring to our communities, in terms of their economic and social impact as employers, and through providing education and training, recognising trade unions and providing nursery facilities. That must be acknowledged and understood in determining where the public sector can do better and develop beyond its service boundaries to make significant changes within each community it serves.

When people in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and other areas throughout Scotland read the SNP motion, they will see a degree of self-congratulation on the part of the Government. Throughout Scotland, major service providers are having to cut their baselines to make their budgets balance. East Lothian Council has cut its baseline by £4.5 million and in Fife the baseline has been cut by £12.5 million—and it goes on. Those are not efficiencies and they are not due to removing duplication, bureaucracy or overlaps; they are cuts in services, and there are many examples of them. One need only look at the headlines from many papers: "Council orders £16m cutbacks", "Council cuts 'could cost lives'", "Unions fear major council budget cuts", "Edinburgh Council in Crisis",

“Thousands join council cuts protest” and “Edinburgh has seen massive cuts in services”.

We are against the SNP motion because its self-congratulatory tone shows no understanding of what is really happening in our public services as a result of the financial settlements that the SNP Government has brought us. The people of Aberdeen and elsewhere will be uncomfortable with the motion. The elderly are paying more for their care, council house rents have increased at a rate greater than inflation and union leaders are demanding meetings to fight compulsory redundancies—the list goes on. There have been cuts to music tuition and increases in ferry fares. That is not about duplication, bureaucracy or overlaps, it is about cuts and increases in charges for those services.

Local government funding has increased by 1.5 per cent, compared with a 5.1 percent increase in the Scottish budget as a whole. That is why there are real problems. Mr Swinney and I recently attended a conference at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, where many of our voluntary sector organisations expressed extreme concern about the push and squeeze and the cuts that they are experiencing. We have heard about that from the Cyrenians in Aberdeen, from Quarriers and from organisations in other parts of the country. The speakers at the conference informed delegates of the serious financial position in which they find themselves as a result of the so-called historic concordat. As one director of social work said:

“these items are not efficiency savings that can be reinvested but are more traditional budget cuts”.

That is what we are seeing: increases in charges and budget cuts.

The minister made a number of remarks in relation to quangos. The pledge is to cut quangos by 40 per cent, but 39 new quangos are being created—the minister calls them short-term groups. They are costing £800,000 of taxpayers' money—the Scottish Broadcasting Commission alone is costing £500,000. The Government should acknowledge that it is creating more non-parliamentary bodies. It might label them differently, but a quango is a quango, and the money is still being spent on behalf of the taxpayer to deliver them—for example, £30,000 is being spent on the Council of Economic Advisers. Let us not kid ourselves that major cuts are being made to quangos. The SNP Government has joined a few of them together and stolen some ideas from the previous Administration, but it is not delivering on its manifesto commitment, just as it has failed to deliver on so many other manifesto commitments.

We share the desire to make our services more efficient and to cut bureaucracy as much as

possible, but we do not support the hypocrisy of the SNP's self-congratulatory motion, which can be compared with the real experience of people throughout Scotland.

I move amendment S3M-1849.2, to leave out from “with the aim” to end and insert:

“but recognises that public service cuts seen all over Scotland are undermining those very services and that the cuts being experienced are not the result of reducing duplication, bureaucracy and overlaps but rather a failure to invest by the Scottish Government.”

15:15

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):**

We heard a spirited defence of the previous Government's record from Mr Kerr. Perhaps we will hear more from the Liberal Democrats when they speak. That would be fitting, perhaps, from the people who put the “government” into efficient government.

The danger of a debate on effective public services is that it, above all others, is destined to descend rapidly into jargon. We heard some of that jargon from Mr Crawford in his speech, including talk of decluttering the landscape, aligning to the Government's purpose and reforming public services. Such phrases used to be considered vintage Matherisms—that is, until yesterday, when the man surpassed himself. Today, the Minister for Parliamentary Business revealed himself to be but a pale imitation of Mr Mather, who talked yesterday about “small acrobatic countries”. There were some verbal gymnastics in Mr Crawford's speech, but we did not hear whether small acrobatic countries have good public services, lessons to teach us in culling quangos—

**Robert Brown:** Or small acrobats.

**Derek Brownlee:** Or, indeed, small acrobats, as Robert Brown helpfully points out. We will simply never know.

As ever, I am trying to bring all parties together in a consensus. My amendment makes two important points—that there is always scope to improve public services, and that such improvements need not come at an additional financial cost. Who could possibly disagree with that? We will find out at 5 o'clock.

Public services should evolve over time. The public's expectations change, and what public services are capable of delivering also changes. It is only right and proper that public services are responsive to, and able to meet, changing needs. However, it is lazy and simplistic to assume that the answer to every problem is to spend more money or that services can be improved only by spending more money on them. Higher levels of spending are sometimes required, but they should

not be the automatic first response of the Government—or, indeed, the Opposition—to every problem that confronts us.

No less a figure than the Prime Minister said that we are in an era of limited financial resources, but that view is not shared by the Scottish Labour Party, which demands more spending on local government come what may. Then again, not many of the Prime Minister's views are shared by the Scottish Labour Party, other than, perhaps, his view on the leadership of the Labour Party in Scotland.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** Does the member acknowledge that the Prime Minister and the Scottish Labour Party are as one in believing that David Cameron as Prime Minister would damage the country irrevocably?

**Derek Brownlee:** I think that David Cameron will soon have the opportunity to prove that view wrong.

The Prime Minister is right to say that financial resources are limited. Money that is allocated to one area of spending must come from another area or from tax rises.

Labour's amendment mentions cuts. Most of the attention that has been paid to cuts is focused on proposals that have been made in local government. Sarah Boyack lodged a motion that blames all the cuts on the council tax freeze. Overall, however, local government received more money this year than last, and the council tax freeze was not just fully funded but overfunded.

Labour complains that there is

"a failure to invest by the Scottish Government."

A case can be made for more spending by local government, just as a case can be made for any area of public spending, but as the Minister for Parliamentary Business pointed out, Labour supported the local government finance order. In fact, it supported two of them.

**Andy Kerr:** It is a statement of fact that local government received an increase of 1.5 per cent when the Scottish budget went up by 5.1 per cent. Local government's share of the Scottish budget under Labour was 35.5 per cent. Under the SNP it is 33.5 per cent. That is a reduction of 2 per cent.

**Derek Brownlee:** The proper comparison is with the year-on-year increase in spending, which shows an increase.

The Labour Party raised many concerns about the impact on vulnerable groups of removing ring fencing, but that is a fundamentally different issue. If councils choose to move spending from one area to another and they are wrong, they should be held to account for that in the council chamber, not here—not through direction or micromanagement from Holyrood.

Autonomy for local government is important because it concerns how we achieve better public services. Focusing services on local needs is best done locally. If councils can innovate and take different approaches to problems, that allows us to evaluate over time what works best and why. Just as devolution has allowed public services to evolve differently in the United Kingdom's constituent parts, local autonomy will allow councils to take a similar approach.

Mr Kerr mentioned efficiency targets. Some have said that the Government's efficiency targets cannot be achieved, but we have not said that. However, we wonder whether the political will exists to drive through the efficiency savings. Time will tell.

Mr Kerr made an interesting point about how the efficiency savings are delivered in the Scottish budget. The Government in Westminster is taking exactly the same approach—the 3 per cent targets from the Gershon review come straight off the baseline. The Labour Party's different approaches north and south of the border are interesting.

I hope that no serious politician would argue that scope does not exist to deliver better value for money and to improve public services. We should debate what we can deliver and how, rather than play the blame game that it looks like we will have today.

I move amendment S3M-1849.1, to insert at end:

"believes that there is scope for continuous improvement in the design and delivery of public services, and rejects the notion that improvements in public services can only be achieved by increased levels of public spending."

15:21

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I was struck by Derek Brownlee's point about the changing face of government, whereby one sector has priority then another sector becomes a priority at a different time. Under the SNP Government, I presume that the parliamentary draftsmen who provide legislation for the Parliament do not have terribly good career prospects.

The debate is important and the Liberal Democrats have called for it ever since the Government published its plans to reduce the number of national public service organisations by what I thought was 25 per cent but which I now see is 26 per cent. The First Minister has talked about the subject and he was originally a bit wobbly about his start point. He included several bodies that the previous Government had planned to remove—not least the 32 children's panel advisory committees—and he claimed the 32 justice of the peace advisory committees that we abolished, which I mentioned.

Ministers' methods in relation to the sportscotland fiasco were instructive. They told us that they had consulted on the issue. They talked to people in the field, but they could not tell us precisely who they had talked to and they would not publish the responses.

**Bruce Crawford:** The 32 justice of the peace advisory committees had been rationalised to six, which represents a reduction of 26 and not of 32, as the member claimed.

**Robert Brown:** I accept that, but the substantial point is that the decision was made under the previous Government—that shows the continuity of Government policy.

It turned out that sportscotland was being dealt with on the model of the historic national concordat, whereby ministers said that one thing had been agreed and everybody else said another thing. The inevitable result was a U-turn that calmed but did not end months of total uncertainty and confusion in the sports sector in the vital months as we developed the plans for the Commonwealth games. That was rather less the "radical and far reaching" ideas to blow

"the fresh wind of democracy through Scotland's quango culture"

that the First Minister trumpeted and more a self-imposed SNP Government humiliation for the hapless Stewart Maxwell that was—if anything—reminiscent of Tony Blair's cack-handed move to abolish the post of Lord Chancellor, which some of us recall.

Liberal Democrats do not demur from the objective of streamlining government. We supported the objective in government and we support it now. Indeed, retrenchment was one arm of the famous trinity of liberal themes as long ago as Gladstone, who famously got his staff to reuse pencils. He managed to run the empire with a part-time secretary, whereas the SNP cannot run Scotland effectively with a bagful of ministers, no legislation of worth and no less than 14 MSPs seconded as parliamentary liaison officers. So neutered is the SNP parliamentary group that only eight SNP members have not been appointed as ministers, committee conveners or liaison officers. I wonder what Glasgow has done to fall so out of grace with the boss that three of the remaining SNP back benchers should be from there.

What is the rationale for reducing the number of public bodies by 25 or even 26 per cent? Why not 20, 30 or 27.25 per cent? Twenty five per cent is a suspiciously round figure. It is claimed that the process will save £25 million over three years. We could perhaps have guessed that, as 25 appears to be the magic Scottish National Party number. That saving is already offset by the £16 million

start-up costs of the new skills quango, Skills Development Scotland.

Liberal Democrats welcome the target of £25 million, but it is possibly the only clear figure in the SNP Government's programme. After all, as we saw this morning, there is total obscurity over the number of houses that it intends to build and how much they will cost and, as we saw at lunch time, over the number of schools, if any, that will materialise under the Scottish futures trust. We welcome the £25 million, but it is small pickings from the £2 billion efficiency savings postulated by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, which so far appear to be relatively unplanned, uncosted and unspecified.

The faggots were being placed under Alex Salmond's blaze of the quangos while, in the six months to November 2007, 24 new public bodies were being set up. Perhaps the cabinet secretary might be kind enough to update those figures to May 2008 when he closes the debate.

My concern about the SNP's policy is that, although it appears to have been drawn up on the back of the proverbial matchbox, it is nevertheless presented as a decision made, rather than a proposal to be consulted on. That is why the Government got into a mess over sportscotland and why there is anger at the proposal to abolish the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, which means that the distinctive voice of disabled people will be lost and subsumed into the generic Public Transport Users Committee. I am not aware of a particular fuss about the scrapping of the Building Standards Advisory Committee, but a bland statement that

"expert advice on building standards will be obtained in other ways"

hardly gives reassurance that plan B is viable and considered.

Some of those bodies were long fought for, do a vital job and should not be unceremoniously dumped without examination and consultation. There has been no cohesive examination of those proposals by sector and no consultation to flush out the pros and cons of the perfunctory decisions that have been made. The figures and percentages have been plucked out of a hat; it is not about what is good for the sector concerned.

I support the Government's direction of travel on tribunals. Lord Phillips is reviewing administrative justice and is due to report in August. The review will produce proposals, which I hope will be consulted on, and the consultation will lead to decisions. That is the right way to do it.

It is time for the SNP Government to bring coherence, order and principle to its programme. It should bring the most significant of its proposals to

Parliament and, above all, I encourage it to get into the habit of consulting first and deciding later, rather than the other way round.

I move amendment S3M-1849.3, to leave out from “opportunity” to end and insert:

“commitment from successive Scottish administrations to reduce waste, bureaucracy and duplication in Scotland’s public sector; notes with concern the current administration’s superficial approach, which appears to be driven by numerical and financial targets alone rather than principles of good governance, and the failure of the Scottish Government to consult properly with the interests affected by key decisions, and regrets that these decisions were taken without parliamentary approval.”

15:27

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** In the course of any debate on the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, it is easy to forget about those who will be affected by the changes that will be introduced as a result of the Government’s programmes: the employees. I had 10 years’ experience in public service and I know that there are many dedicated public servants who are committed to their role in our public services. That factor should be kept in mind when we make any changes and debate the issue.

However, like many members, many complaints that I receive from constituents and local businessmen are about inefficiency, difficulties with public services, duplication, complications and the lack of responsiveness that they experience when they raise issues with public bodies. I even receive some complaints from those who work in public bodies about inefficiencies and the fact that their organisation is not modernising as the employee believes it could to achieve better outcomes. Anything that the Government can do to create a more efficient public service is in the interests of not only the public and the taxpayer, but public servants. People will be much more receptive to public servants when they are more effective.

There is a contrast between the way in which the Scottish Government has gone about the process and the London Government’s approach to trying to achieve more effective or more efficient public services. The approach in London on the redundancy issue appears to be about the head count—the more people we get out the door, the more effective our public services will be—whereas the approach up here, which involves no compulsory redundancies, is one that I believe will allow us to deliver effective public services.

**Derek Brownlee:** Is the member aware that there are about to be a number of redundancies in London that will significantly improve the efficiency of the public services?

**Michael Matheson:** That comes as no surprise from a Conservative, but it is not always the best

way to get the best out of our public services.

The Government has made significant steps in the past year with a 25 per cent reduction in the number of quangos and a reduction in the number of national public organisations to 120. As the minister said, by 2011 that will be the lowest number since the start of devolution. We have already heard Opposition members claiming credit for some of those things, but given that the focus is on outcomes, it is clear that the current Government is focused on delivering; the previous Government might just have talked about it in the past.

As we move from an output to an outcome approach that will deliver more transparent and effective public service, we must consider achieving more openness and transparency in our public services by changing their culture. When the Parliament was considering the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Bill, a key theme was how it would apply to public bodies. One of the issues that came up was that the biggest challenge to the effectiveness of a freedom of information regime was the culture of public bodies and the need to make them more open, engaged and transparent. One of the challenges for a Government trying to meet its efficiency targets and ensure that public services are more effective is to change the culture and behaviour of some of our public bodies.

Whether it is Scottish Natural Heritage, which thinks of itself as judge and jury when it comes to certain dealings with my constituents, or Scottish Water, which thinks nothing of spending four years putting off farmers over compensation, some public bodies think that they can do what they want without effectively engaging with the public or recognising the consequences of their inaction. That is a culture issue, and changing culture must underpin our ensuring more effective public services.

An example of the ineffectiveness of some public bodies is provided by what happened to a company in my constituency. In September last year it became apparent, from a bid made to the European Commission for European Social Fund moneys, that food was no longer going to be part of the ESF in Scotland. There were consequences for thousands of people employed in the bakery industry in Scotland, whose support and training were provided by ESF funding. The civil servants put up their hands and admitted that they had made a mistake when they made the application to the EU. However, since September last year, the bakery industry, which trains almost 1,000 people every year across Scotland, has had no response from the civil servants or the department on how they are going to rectify the problem.

That is not effective public service. The industry is important to our country and food policy is a priority for the Government. The civil servants have accepted that they made a mistake, but they have not engaged with the industry to find a solution and address the problem. That is an example of the type of public service inefficiency and ineffectiveness that frustrates people in industry.

In the course of creating a culture change in our public services, I hope that ministers will ensure that a big part of it is about being much more engaged. I also hope that public services will recognise that they are part of the solution to some of the difficulties experienced at times by the business sector and others.

15:34

**Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab):** If any student of the Parliament is looking for a case study of the different approaches to debates taken by the Government and the Opposition, today is a good example. This morning, we debated a detailed Labour Party motion on housing. In stark contrast, this afternoon the motion before us asks us to welcome

“the opportunity to debate proposals to deliver better public services”,

but it does so in the now traditional manner of the Government, because the rest of the motion consists of nothing more than prosy sentiments aimed at getting away with the perception that the Government is doing something substantial without telling us how it is going to do anything at all.

The motion asks us to support the reduction of “duplication, bureaucracy and overlaps in the public sector”.

Who would disagree with that aspiration? Unfortunately, we are then subjected to the usual Matheresque bunkum about

“the aim of achieving greater focus and alignment with the Purpose of Government”.

The motion then goes on to ask us to look to

“the outcomes set out in the national performance framework”

for the evidence of what the Government is about to do. Unfortunately, I am none the wiser for having done so. The “Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007”, which contains the framework, presents us with buzz words, managementspeak and meaningless baloney, all aimed at telling us that the Government’s economic strategy aims to do this or that. However, there is nothing in the framework that even hints at how those aspirations are to be met.

We are to have “high level Purpose targets” and

“Five Strategic Objectives support delivery of the Purpose”.

We are informed that

“The whole of the public sector will, for the first time, be expected to contribute to one overarching Purpose”.

However, nowhere are we let in on the secret of how the Government intends this so-called purpose ever to be achieved. Based on the Government’s record up to now, we can conclude only that it intends, in short, to pass the buck. The historic concordat comes to the rescue again. It is dragged out every time the Government is asked how something will be achieved—“It’s in the historic concordat,” we are told. There is no need for any explanation of what exactly we are debating this afternoon, because it is not for this Government to explain anything.

The debate before us, therefore, amounts to a request for us to keep our fingers crossed, let the Government take the credit for what our public sector does right and blame the public sector for what might go wrong, even if it cannot admit, despite the growing evidence, that things are going wrong.

Quite simply, that is not good enough. Scotland’s public services are crucial to the fabric of our country. Our people value services such as education, health care and public transport far too much to leave them to chance. Modern and efficient public services lie at the very heart of a productive and fair society, which is why Labour believes in our public services and the people who deliver them.

Yes, public services must improve their productivity, efficiency and performance. Service users and taxpayers have a right to expect that their hard-earned money is being spent on the right things and that public services are getting value for that money. Service users and taxpayers have to be confident that what is available is being used to best effect. What really counts is what people get for what is put in from the public purse. That is not a responsibility that this Government or any Government can abdicate, but, unfortunately, that is what this Government wants to do.

The Government needs to tell us how it will tackle the variations in performance across our public services and bring all services up to the standards that are presently achieved by the best. Differences in performance are too marked at present and could get worse if single outcome agreements are not tight enough.

No one should be against local flexibility, but wide variations and postcode lotteries are not acceptable either.

How will the Government address variations in the cost of services between authorities? What will the Government do to help us spread more

effective and efficient practice throughout Government? The Government could have used this afternoon to answer those questions. Instead, we have had yet another insubstantial motion that tells us nothing and a debate that the Government hopes will allow it to skate around the issue. The motion confirms that the Government stands for spin over substance and perception over reality. It believes its own spin and has entered a delusional world if it thinks that the motion is good enough for the people of Scotland.

Unfortunately, if we look through the document for examples of what we could be debating this afternoon, we find, on biodiversity, that the Government is going to

"increase the index of abundance of terrestrial breeding birds".

I do not know whether that means that it will try to count penguins or explore the possibility of breeding in midair. We have to know exactly what that means. That is no more meaningful than the objective to

"Increase the proportion of adults making one or more visits to the outdoors per week",

which leaves us with a vision of wardens going around our local communities, dragging people out into the street to ensure that that is what the Scotland of the future will be.

That is not efficient Government; it is baloney. It is not good enough. The Government should not pretend that that is what Scotland is looking for from the Parliament.

15:39

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** As a local councillor and public servant for many years, I am pleased to participate in the debate. How we deliver effective public services is one of the key issues—perhaps the key issue—facing Parliament and inherited by the Scottish National Party Government.

The Government has been clear in its approach to public services and its agenda for change, as exemplified by the agreement with Scotland's local authorities. The amendments offered by the Liberal Democrats and Labour suggest that they have been surprised by the pace of change in the past year.

Far from being superficial, the changes being introduced are both wide-ranging and fundamental. The de-cluttering process that was referred to earlier has been widely welcomed and delivers on a promise that was not delivered by the previous Executive.

Instead of just talking about reductions in waste, bureaucracy and duplication, the Government is

already acting by bringing in-house much of Communities Scotland, the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, and the Building Standards Agency; revising and aligning the Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland networks; and strengthening Skills Development Scotland. Proposals for reducing the number of public agencies have been published. Who in Scotland will lament the demise of the Fisheries (Electricity) Committee?

The agreement with local authorities opens up the prospect of a fundamental change in the delivery of public services. This, combined with the sweeping away of the micromanagement of local authorities, has been welcomed. For the first time in decades, local authorities will have real control over how to deliver for their communities.

There are regular attempts in the chamber to talk up a sense of cuts and crisis in local government. However, local authority leaders of all parties have embraced the settlement with the Government. That is by far a more reliable indicator of the views of those who really matter—our local authorities themselves.

The delivery of public services is not an end in itself. The services should be focused on delivering real and tangible outcomes for local communities. For too long, significant resources have been invested in poorly designed services that fail to deliver for communities. Today, Audit Scotland again drew attention to the increase in overcrowding in Scotland's jails. Although the Auditor General may be too diplomatic to say so, it is clear that this reflects the failure of previous policy.

The result of the failure is communities blighted by a high level of re-offending. For too many, life in prison has become preparation for a life in crime.

Last month, Audit Scotland highlighted declining participation in sport in Scotland—just as we are gearing up for the Commonwealth games in 2014. The key message in the report to the Audit Committee was clear and damning:

"There is no clear link between the national strategy for sport and councils' investment of money in facilities and services across Scotland."

Significant amounts of national funding have been targeted at increasing participation in sport, but targets for participation by young people are not being met and adult participation is actually declining. Clearly, as with the prisons, the previous approach to sport did not work.

The Government has made clear its long-term ambition and its strategy for Scotland's public services and for Scotland.

**Robert Brown:** I accept the point; the Auditor General's report is interesting in that context. Will

Mr Coffey indicate what would need to happen in order to make the connection between the inputs and the outcomes more effective, and how that would be monitored by Government?

**Willie Coffey:** In order to define the outcomes we want to achieve, we will have to engage far more closely with the public. As someone who has been involved in local government for a long time, I accept that many outcomes are hard to measure. A lot of it is perception based. A way to overcome that to a great degree is to ask the public what they think of the service delivery. That is often a better indicator than specifically asking people whether we meet direct targets.

The strategic objectives underpinning the Government's activities are spelled out and are being used to drive forward policy and delivery. The efficient Government programme for 2008 to 2011 spells out how this will be achieved. Already, that has been translated into the efficiency delivery plan. Those documents provide the detail on where efficiency gains will be made and how they are to be used. What is important for service users is that the Government is clear that service levels must be maintained or improved. It is crucial that effectiveness is not overlooked in the drive for efficiency. People in Scotland are interested in the positive outcomes that are achieved—not just the programmes that are delivered or how much money gets spent.

The Government is reshaping Scotland's public services so as to make them more flexible, responsive and effective. The resources freed up by cutting bureaucracy and duplication can be used more productively to innovate and improve service delivery to communities throughout Scotland. The evidence from polls is that that approach is driving a growing confidence in the Government among the business community and beyond. In a recent poll of businessmen and women, over half of those contacted thought that the Government was doing a good or excellent job—hardly the message of doom and gloom that is being peddled around the chamber.

The Government will achieve its ambitions if Scotland's public services deliver their full value. The evidence from the Government's first year in office is that its approach is widely welcomed. It has engaged with local authorities, business and the wider community in delivering a step change in Scotland's performance. I am delighted to support the motion.

15:45

**Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** The Scottish Government's stated aspiration to have less bureaucratic public services is inseparable from the broader issues around the

efficiency and, indeed, the funding of those services.

Some of the smoke generated by the Scottish Government thus far on its anti-bureaucratic course comes not so much from a bonfire of the quangos but from a smoke-and-mirrors ploy by Alex Salmond, whose Administration has created around 39 new quangos in the past year.

Smoke also got in our eyes when we tried to get into the detail of the Scottish Government's first budget for Scotland. It was sad that as soon as John Swinney came to power, he abandoned his previously stated commitment to a more transparent budget process, but it was bad that he tried to make the current budget process less transparent by withholding key information from parliamentary committees—for which he was admonished by the Finance Committee convener, SNP member Andrew Welsh, on behalf of that committee and many others.

In preparing for the debate, I downloaded from the Scottish Government website the not-very-historic concordat between the Scottish Government and Scottish local government. I know that it is not very historic because, on the website, it is filed under "miscellaneous". It is true that the concordat might well assist in reducing bureaucracy through, for example, a stated joint approach to the important regulatory issues raised in the Crerar report. Overall, however, the concordat is mostly about money.

Although the language about outcome agreements might seem to take a light touch, we should bear in mind that Scotland's councils are the only part of our public services that have a statutory duty to seek best value in service delivery. We should bear in mind that John Swinney fettered the discretion of councils in setting their budgets by making some of their grant support dependent on a council tax freeze. We should bear in mind that the Scottish Government proposes what it calls a local income tax—it would in fact be set nationally—that would completely strip from elected councillors their ability to raise finance locally.

Therefore, the concordat is merely a prelude to a bonfire—not of the quangos but of local democracy. Why does the Scottish Government advocate independence for Scotland—although, as we have seen, not yet—but seek to turn Scotland's local government into mere local administration? Why does the Scottish Government seek fiscal autonomy to replace the block grant from Westminster but seek to remove councils' fiscal autonomy and replace it with a block grant?

**Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member explain to me, from the perspective of

someone who, like me, has a council background, why the Government's elimination of most of the ring-fenced funding somehow fetters what a local authority is required to do?

**Charlie Gordon:** I am on the record in the Parliament time and again as opposing ring fencing, but when the member's party insists on a council tax freeze, de facto it partly fetters elected councillors' discretion. The member does not necessarily think that that is a bad outcome, but it is a fact that the councillors had their discretion fettered because they were told by the Government, "We are holding some of your grant back unless you agree to a council tax freeze," and facts are chieftains that winna ding.

**Nigel Don** *rose—*

**Charlie Gordon:** I am not going to take any more interventions because this is good stuff and I want to hear what I am going to say next.

Next spring, as the Scottish public realise what the Scottish Government's budget and the concordat did not deliver—because, in the best of all possible worlds, not everything can be delivered—the Scottish Government's treasurer, Mr Swinney, will become more unpopular. It is the unhappy fate of all treasurers, be they in bowling clubs, residents associations or Governments, to become unpopular as agreements that are accepted by colleagues in principle become unacceptable in practice. John Swinney has probably already found that one or two of his ministerial colleagues have, as they say, gone native, perhaps urged on by civil servants to defend their departments.

Apart from local government, the public sector has no best-value duty, although we have the efficient government programme and the Howat report. Mr Swinney published that report and then appeared to embrace most of its contents so, as we speak, several of Howat's proposals are being argued over behind the scenes. To name but two, there are proposals to reduce community pharmacy services and extend Scottish Police Services Authority procurement to the fire and ambulance services. Beneath all that, people ask me about the direction in which the Scottish Government is taking Scotland's public services—it is rightwards. The true direction is towards not a Scandinavian-style social democracy with generous public services, but an Irish model with low business taxes and centralised, moderately funded public services.

15:51

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am inclined to agree with Michael McMahon's analysis that the motion is an unambitious little one that does not take us very far, but I welcome it

in so far as it gives me the opportunity to introduce a host of ideas that only a Conservative is qualified to introduce in such a debate. I begin with the Conservative amendment, which mentions the notion that public services can be improved only by spending more money. I think that we are past that notion and I hope that Labour has learned from its mistakes when in government, particularly in the early days of the Scottish Parliament, when huge amounts of public money were ploughed into health services to no avail. Only last night, I congratulated Andy Kerr on tidying up that mess.

As we consider the expenditure of public money and what we get for it, we must consider efficiency. The motion is entitled "Effective Public Services", which is something that we should all pursue. However, although I forgive the Government for making the mistake of thinking that expenditure of public money is the same as improvement in public services, I cannot forgive Bruce Crawford for the persistent failure in his opening speech to realise that public services and the public sector are two different things and that the opportunity to exploit the private and voluntary sectors more effectively can deliver much-improved and more efficient public services.

I know that that idea exists in parts of the Government because, only two weeks ago, I attended a meeting of representatives from the north-east with the leader and deputy leader of Aberdeen City Council. At the meeting, John Swinney explained at great length where the council had gone wrong and how it might steer back from its difficult situation. He said that keeping too many services in-house and preserving the council's funding streams at the expense of the voluntary sector was one reason why the council had lost its way.

I have heard other Government ministers explain at great length how the private sector can deliver public services effectively. At the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee this week, I heard the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, explain at great length why the extension of the ScotRail franchise and the incentivisation of further development of services would actually deliver money back to the Scottish Government and to the Scottish transport user, rather than simply resulting in incentives disappearing and money being wasted. That represents another opportunity for the private sector to deliver.

Why does this Government refuse to realise that many more opportunities exist for private sector investment and ingenuity to deliver real improvements in public service? Why does the Government not take the opportunity to join the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats and do

something about Scottish Water, bringing about the efficiencies that are possible there? Why does the Government not join us in taking Scottish Water into a mutual model that will deliver real savings for the taxpayer? Why does the Government not take the opportunity to do something about providing effective public services? The Government could do those things by turning away from the dogma that public service and the public sector are synonymous.

During the debate, other points have been raised that concern me. Although we in the Conservatives understand why the Government has pursued efficiency savings without compulsory redundancies, we must never forget that public service is not a job-creation scheme. Effective and efficient public services can, in themselves, deliver the opportunity for improved private sector growth that can create as many jobs as the public sector, and can do so in such a way as to generate a return for the economy as a whole.

There are many opportunities that the Government has not taken up. Let us work together and move forward to a point at which public service can be delivered effectively and efficiently by all sectors—not just the public sector. Such a move, and such opportunities, will deliver the real efficiency savings that the Government has sought for so long. They can be delivered if the chance is taken.

15:57

**Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Like my colleague William Coffey, I would like to take the opportunity to consider specific opportunities within the influence of local authorities to deliver better public services.

I am a new resident of the city of Aberdeen, and I would like to list some of the things that Aberdeen City Council has been up to in recent years. In particular, it has undertaken to transform the delivery of its services to the public. In recent months, it has approved a number of transformation strategies covering a range of areas including adult services, children's services, sport and leisure, and waste and the environment.

With regard to social care, the council is taking steps to move towards the in control system of social care delivery, in which people with care needs are given direct control over the services that they receive and are provided with funding to ensure that they are able to choose their own service providers and service. That is a step beyond the concept of direct payments.

The key principles behind the in control system are that people have a right to independent living, a right to an individual and flexible budget and a right to self-determination. The approach means

that decision making will be made as close to the person as possible, to reflect their individual interests and preferences.

In children's services, the council is committed to active promotion of the placement of looked-after children within the local authority area. That has tangible benefits for the child and their family, as they are located close to each other. It also has benefits for the council in reducing the costs of placing children outside the city.

At the same time, the transformation programme is placing a particular emphasis on the principle of early intervention, which the Scottish Government is keen to promote. Early intervention, through partnership working, would undoubtedly help to reduce the numbers of looked-after children in the city.

The council is now taking steps to modernise and improve the sports and leisure service as a whole. It is moving towards trust status, which has proven successful in other local authorities. However, it is also important to focus on an improvement that highlights some of the long-standing problems faced by the city since 1996.

Believe it or not, the council's booking system is a throwback to the days before the creation of the unitary authorities—it harks back to the days of the regional and district councils. There are in effect two unsynchronised facilities booking systems, which leads to what can only be described as a bureaucratic mess, resulting in a poorer service to the public and impeding the council's efforts to modernise its working practices.

That anomaly, which has existed since the council's formation in 1996, is just one of many that have had to be rectified. I welcome the fact that the council has finally recognised the problem and is seeking to rectify it through the transformation strategies. Incidentally, I should point out that a computerised leisure booking system will automatically capture some of the data that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will need if he is to find out how things have changed.

On waste and the environment, the council's commitment to ambitious recycling targets, which will run in tandem with our ambitious national policies on reduced landfill and increased recycling, is excellent news. Moreover, the recent news that kerbside recycling schemes are to be rolled out to tenement properties and multistorey properties is an extremely positive development and will undoubtedly help to improve recycling rates across the city. Moves to introduce commingled garden and food waste recycling will also boost recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste being sent to landfill.

We have to bear in mind the implications of the

landfill tax, which will severely punish councils that do not actively reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. As a result, we must surely welcome the steps that Aberdeen City Council is taking in that respect.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the member give way?

**Nigel Don:** I will, but I should first make the point that refusing to recycle is a classic case of pouring money into a hole in the ground.

**Jeremy Purvis:** I absolutely agree. Does the member therefore understand the frustration felt at this end of the country, where Borders Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Lothian authorities had put together a joint funding bid for a joint waste minimisation project, only to have it cancelled by this Government? That means that there will have to be five separate waste minimisation projects. How efficient is that?

**Nigel Don:** With respect, it is not my job to answer for the Government, particularly on an issue that I know nothing about. I am sure that the ministers will be willing to answer the member's question.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** One minute.

**Nigel Don:** On Tuesday, Aberdeen City Council and the maritime and environmental organisation KIMO International launched a scheme to promote reusable bags as an alternative to plastic carrier bags. I know that people are concerned about the issue, but the scheme shows that it can be dealt with locally simply by encouraging the right people to do the right things.

I clearly have no time to expand on other issues that are set out in the draft single outcome agreement. However, I must point out the Aberdeen renewable energy group, in which the council has a stake, and its promotion of offshore wind power; plans to invest in healthy weight initiatives for seven to 13-year-olds—as convener of the cross-party group on obesity, I know that that is when such issues must be tackled; plans to increase the number of foster carers; and, finally, better controlled access to multistorey flats. It will be obvious to members how such moves will improve the safety, security, health and wellbeing of Aberdeen's residents.

16:03

**Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab):** Efficient public services play a vital part in our society and provide cohesion, opportunities and a safety net for many of our citizens. I know from experience that a range of dedicated people deliver quality services every day; I also know from experience that, on far too many occasions, we make it damn hard for them to do so. If these services are vital

today, they will become even more vital in the future.

However, in the relatively near future—say over the next 15 years—our relative economic position in the world and our society's demographics will change, our citizens' needs will increase and their expectations will grow dramatically. The question is how to sustain what we have and how to meet those growing expectations. Money alone will not do it. We can engage in as much rhetoric as we like, but the fact is there will be less money around. Irrespective of the actions of Government, our relative economic position will change and we will become less and less able to keep throwing money at inefficiently organised services.

If we are really serious about addressing the issue, we will have to put rhetoric to one side and face up to some hard facts. That will take Government action, some of which will be unpopular. Why do we need to do that? For a start, our society will become older and more dependent. Lifestyle choices that are made today will result in extremely expensive health care costs in the future. The world economic order will change; indeed, it has done so already. Some estimates suggest that China will take over from the United States as the world's most powerful economy within the next 10 years. As a result, it will become harder and harder for us to compete economically in a globalised economy.

In Scotland, as elsewhere, knowledge and intellectual property will be the drivers of future economic prosperity, so any country that uses its greatest asset—its people—to best effect will be best placed to provide a platform for success and a safety net against unacceptable decline through the provision of efficient and effective public services.

If we in Scotland are to do that, we will have to face up to some hard facts. Too many of our public services are poorly co-ordinated. Our use of our most precious asset—our people—is all too often focused on the needs of the producer rather than those of the consumer.

I will give an example. Strathclyde Police covers more than half of Scotland; another seven forces cover the rest of the country. Even instinctively, does that seem like a good or cost-effective arrangement? To his credit, the new chief constable of Strathclyde Police has established a long-needed review of management structures in an effort to get more front-line police officers on the street. At the very least, surely that exercise can be replicated across the country.

The protectionism that exists among senior managers in far too many public service organisations is costing us dear today and will deny people the public services that they need and deserve in the future.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** I do not mean to put the member on the spot, but does he accept—I think that he has the imagination to do so—the corollary of what he said, which is that unemployment will rise at a time when we do not have the economic levers to hand to cope with it?

**Tom McCabe:** I in no way accept that proposition. I said that the issue is how we use our human capital. For many years, the fastest growing sector of our economy has been financial services. The industry might be in a bit of trouble at the moment but, as yet, there are no great signs that we in Scotland will be dramatically affected. The people whom we could release from inefficient public services would find their feet in that and other sectors, thereby adding to the dynamism of our economy and the prosperity of our nation. It is a counsel of despair to say that efficient public services will necessarily lead to unemployment in this country. That is simply not the case.

As the years go by, the consumption by our 32 councils, at horrendous expense, of huge numbers of well-educated and professionally trained individuals will be a severe constraint on our ability to afford quality public services. Frankly, we could spend all day citing examples not only of duplication, but of demarcation and protectionism.

As Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform, I engaged in an extensive consultation on the future of our public services. We spoke to service users and managers, among others, across a range of organisations. I tell the Parliament that, without a hint of a political agenda in their voices, people expressed their frustration with a system that hinders and prevents, and which makes it immeasurably more difficult to deliver the services to which they are so rightly committed.

There are dedicated professionals who work at the front line of our public services who are sick to the back teeth of the posturing and protectionism that they see in their own organisations and from politicians. If we are serious about tackling the issue, political courage and considerable up-front investment will be necessary, and there will need to be a willingness to engage with people who work in the public services to reassure and convince them that the changes that are made will be in the interests of everyone in our society. If the current Government is prepared to stand up to that challenge, I will be the first to give it the credit that it is due, but I will judge it by its actions rather than just its words.

16:09

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** If the Government had started

in the way that Tom McCabe so eloquently described, we would have a Government that designs the best method of delivering community public services and then introduces the area structures to match. However, when I read the first line of the Government's motion—

"That the Parliament welcomes the opportunity to debate proposals"—

I was frustrated, because decisions have already been taken and in many areas the position is now set.

Previously, the partners in the Borders—the council, NHS Borders, Scottish Enterprise Borders, the tourism agency, housing associations, the G division of the police force and local community groups—worked in a coterminous, effective and efficient way. The Borders approach was a genuine community partnership that was efficient in delivering public services in a joined-up way. Each agency and body is small compared with those in other parts of Scotland but, together, they had strength and an ability to be efficient for a population of just 108,000.

That was the context in which the Government decided to declutter the local landscape. Last autumn, without having a parliamentary debate or taking a vote on the issue, the Government began pulling the existing arrangement apart. The minister must understand that there is genuine concern in the Borders about the changes. The first change was to Scottish Enterprise Borders, which no longer exists; instead of a dedicated economic development body for the area, there is now a generic Scottish Enterprise across the south of Scotland. The threshold for support for businesses has increased to £1 million or more, which excludes a great number of businesses in the area from economic development support. Scottish Borders Council is now reluctantly responsible for the business gateway; we simply do not know how that will be configured in the future, but I do know that there is no longer a dedicated small business adviser for rural businesses.

The skills function of Scottish Enterprise, which was previously based in a local team in Galashiels that had local knowledge and contacts, is now part of a new national quango: Skills Development Scotland, an organisation with budgeted start-up costs alone of £16 million, as Robert Brown said. There is continuing uncertainty about the regional structure for this new quango. Either the Galashiels team will be based with a south of Scotland team and will shadow the enterprise structure, which makes little economic sense, given the area's links with the Edinburgh and Lothian economic and further and higher education markets that have developed over many

years, or it will fit in with Lothian and will be out of sync with the south of Scotland enterprise body.

That is not just a bureaucratic process. As someone who provides work placements, I received a letter a few weeks ago from Careers Scotland in Galashiels that indicated that matters would no longer be co-ordinated from Galashiels in the Borders but would now be co-ordinated from Glasgow. Today, my office received a new, four-page form for me to fill in, although my information is already on the Careers Scotland database. I must fill in the form within a week to prepare for the beginning of the new academic term in June. All businesses on the database must do that for the organisation in Glasgow.

Next week, a year after the SNP Government came to power, there will be a meeting on how Borders exporters will be supported. We do not know how Scottish Development International will link up at a local level. VisitScotland in the south of Scotland is now a generic body, too, with a focus simply on delivering a national agenda or local contracts to the local councils, which is questionable under state aid rules.

This is not simply about processes; it is about the effective management of local services. I am not scaremongering. The Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee has been taking evidence for our scrutiny of support for the creative industries and, in the Scottish Enterprise written submission, Jack Perry took pride in telling us:

"With the move of Business Gateway functions to Local Authorities we will no longer proactively support businesses that primarily service local markets."

How that fits with the Government's economic strategy, which singles out the Borders as needing specific support, is beyond me.

The essence of the previous approach may have been to consider efficient processes, but now the word "efficiencies" is the new euphemism for spending cuts. I am not scaremongering about this, either. Last week, the Headteachers Association of Scotland told me that a school that was removing three teachers had been instructed to call them "teachers who are surplus to requirements", rather than use the word "redundant". Therefore, we have teachers in Scotland who are surplus to requirements at the same time as the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is saying that she is putting record numbers of teachers into training and that there will be posts in schools for them. That simply is not a credible way of managing public services.

We have the bizarre situation, too, of the merger of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen into the new creative Scotland agency. The Government estimates that there will be £1.4

million set-up costs for that, which will be taken out of the operating budget, so grants to small organisations will be affected. The cabinet secretary may not believe me and may question the validity of the information that was provided about that. However, the convener of the Finance Committee, describing the financial memorandum to the Creative Scotland Bill, said:

"It is the most unreliable estimate that I have seen in my life."

Alex Neil said:

"It seems as if you have stuck your thumb in the air and plucked out a figure ... I do not see how we can even consider the matter now, given the total lack of reliable information."

If that was not enough, the convener went on to say:

"It is one of the vaguest things that I have heard in my life."

Later, he said:

"I think that you can see that the committee is not at all happy. I hope that future financial memoranda will, when possible, be much more accurate, to allow Parliament to have accurate financial information before it."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 22 April 2008; c 397, 398, 399, 400-1.]

Considering that that was an SNP convener speaking to an SNP Government official, a bit more humility in the Government motion would have been appropriate. If ministers do not listen to borderers or to me, they should at least listen to the SNP members of the Finance Committee. The Government has a long way to go before there is any credibility in its efficient government process.

16:15

**Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP):** I am lucky enough to have spent all my working life in one public service or another: first in the Royal Air Force, then in the national health service and finally in the Parliament. I can therefore be described as an enthusiast for public services in general, but that enthusiasm is not unqualified. The services that we offer the public—services that are paid for by the public—are not always of the highest standard. That is why I welcome the debate and the Government's commitment to raising standards and increasing efficiency.

Let us consider some of the problems that can arise in a great public service. There is the problem of size, with a corresponding lengthening of the lines of communication. That problem is magnified when those running the service not only make strategic decisions but insist on micromanaging relatively small areas of it. The result is that middle management becomes demoralised and fearful of making any decisions. An inevitable knock-on effect is that those on the

shop floor—the doctors, nurses, teachers or whoever is actually providing the service to the public—also feel undervalued and powerless to effect change. The net consequence is low morale, and a service that is provided grudgingly and is often of a low standard.

I am therefore delighted that the Government is committed to measuring output rather than input—although that is a difficult job—to judging performance against the five strategic objectives rather than hundreds of centrally laid down targets, and to letting the public have access to objective evidence of how progress is being maintained. I recommend the adoption—perhaps with some modifications—of lessons that have emerged in recent years from the Toyota car factory in Japan. Whether all sections of every public service would benefit from a formal kaizen blitz is dubious, but—

**Andy Kerr:** Such a programme is under way in the NHS, particularly in general practices.

**Ian McKee:** I know that, and I know that there has been a successful kaizen blitz in NHS Lothian, for example in laboratory services, but it is by no means widespread throughout the public services. I suggest that that should be considered with more intensity in future.

The principle of involving all levels of staff in decisions affecting the efficiency of their work and then immediately implementing those decisions with the full backing of higher management could transform sections of many public services almost overnight. Initiatives such as kaizen blitzes and lean management can succeed only if the general strategy is sound. After all, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour was spectacularly successful but strategically disastrous. I remember Sir Ken Calman, in the days when he was chief medical officer at the Scottish health department, under a Conservative Government, complaining about how difficult it was to provide a meaningful service when the politicians running the Scottish NHS, then based at Westminster, kept changing their strategic objectives. I do not wish to trespass too insensitively on private grief, but one is tempted to feel that he must be experiencing a certain sense of déjà vu these days as he contemplates the various and contradictory statements about an independence referendum made by the largest of the three unionist parties that are today his political masters. It is Government's function to set overall objectives, and senior management's to devise the strategies that will achieve those objectives. I am confident that this Government is well on the way to achieving that goal.

There is the question of the funding of public services. I make no apology for raising that matter because extravagant funding decisions reduce the

amount of money that is available for other activities and hence have a deleterious effect.

The full extent of the disaster that is the private finance initiative is only now coming to light. There is not time to deal with that topic at length, but suffice it to say that the previous Government's slack commissioning procedures have allowed PFI bidders to levy an annual unitary charge that is based in part on the initial capital sum involved.

**Andy Kerr:** Will Ian McKee give way on that point?

**Ian McKee:** No, sorry. I want to develop it.

PFI bidders have been allowed to do that despite the capital sum decreasing yearly. They have also been allowed to invest, and reap interest from, unused capital that the taxpayer has already paid for them to borrow and to postpone taking dividend payments on sums that they have invested in a project so that the outstanding debt on which they can claim interest rises dramatically.

Those and other stratagems have contributed to an obscene haemorrhage of money from services that desperately need it into the pockets of financial institutions that, in some cases, have invested no more than a few pounds of their own money in a project. That is not to mention the expensive car parks, undersized hospitals and school facilities being denied to local communities that are the aftermath of many a PFI project. How welcome it is to have the Government's reassurance that we are moving away from that discredited method of funding public services. I look forward to measuring the Government's progress as the months and years go by.

16:21

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Few would argue about the important role that our public services play in Scotland. We have a strong sense of public service and a sense of pride among the people who work in the public sector. That is why I especially welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. The development of our public services is not only of great relevance throughout Scotland but of great interest.

In recent years, I have been increasingly frustrated by the notion that somehow the public sector is a dead hand on the private sector. No one will deny that there have been record levels of investment in the public sector over the past decade, but that was only to compensate for the many years of chronic underfunding that went before.

No one would deny that public services in Scotland need to improve and become more efficient. They are more widely used than ever and are probably as efficient as they have ever been

but, understandably, the public want greater efficiencies. It is now accepted that we live in a 24/7 society, so the public sector must address the expectation that has been fostered by the internet and 24-hour shopping. That is a huge challenge. It will not be easy and will mean that our public services will be required to improve continuously.

From first-hand experience, I know that leadership will be vital in driving forward efficiencies in the public sector, but the role of the workforce in delivering change is also important. Without proper workforce involvement, change will be slower and not as far reaching or as relevant as it could be. Of course, engagement at a strategic level with organisations such as the Scottish Trades Union Congress would be welcome. However, if it is not more important, it is certainly more meaningful to ensure that there is engagement at workforce level and lower down, including with all trade unions and workforce representatives throughout the public sector.

I would be interested to hear what steps the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that the efficiency savings that have been highlighted today and earlier in the session can be achieved. For example, are the cabinet secretary and the minister convinced that the skills exist in the public sector to realise the potential efficiency savings? Will they highlight the work that has been undertaken to map out those skills or will the Government rely on capacity being built in the public sector as we move forward?

Skills Development Scotland came up earlier in the debate as an example of how three organisations have been brought together. I do not think that anyone would disagree with the single-agency approach, but stakeholders who are trying to engage with the organisation are concerned about a lack of focus and lack of coherence on its aims and objectives. That concern needs to be at the front of ministers' minds when they bring different organisations together.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the previous Executive had regular meetings with trade unions to discuss issues of joint concern in the public services forum. The forum provided a useful place to discuss the strategic direction of Government on the public sector and ensured that wider issues were addressed collectively. As someone who sat on the other side of the table from the previous Executive in the forum meetings, I know that such meetings can provide a valuable exchange. The cabinet secretary is not here just now, but I would be interested to hear him confirm in his summing up whether the forum still exists in the same form or whether he intends to re-establish it in the near future.

Of course we want the Scottish Government and the public sector more widely to be an exemplar

employer in Scotland. The public sector must strive to be the best for health and safety, employee relations and workforce development.

There have been guarantees about compulsory redundancies, but I hope that the minister and the cabinet secretary will confirm that internal budgets for workforce development and the nice-to-do things that organisations need to do, which can come under pressure, will not be under threat in a wider efficiency drive.

**Margo MacDonald:** If the member accepts the need for efficiency in the delivery of service, the corollary of which is that fewer people will be employed in delivering that service, does he agree with his colleague Mr McCabe that we should have no fear of that because the Scottish economy is capable of building more jobs?

**John Park:** I was just going to come on to that. I was going to talk about compulsory redundancies, but Margo MacDonald has made me think about redeployment. The key thing is effective redeployment. I worked in a workplace where there were 3,000 redundancies. Most of the people who were made redundant found other areas in which to work, whether in the same workplace or outside it, because effective redeployment was in place.

The redeployment of staff in the public sector will be crucial in reshaping the public sector. However, I have not seen any evidence of a single agency to do that in the Scottish Government's plans. I suggest that a central resource should be developed in the Scottish Government, in conjunction with the recognised trade unions, which can match individual employees with the jobs that fit their skills. People want to stay in the public sector, regardless of whether they are going to be there long term.

On the wider issue of public sector reform, there is something that annoys me about what is happening now. I have tried to contribute to the debate in a constructive way. At the most recent meeting of the Council of Economic Advisers, a body about which I believe there is cross-party consensus in the Parliament, the cost to the taxpayer of travel alone was £13,000. That is a ludicrous figure for a meeting that lasted not even a day. If the Government is serious about smaller, more efficient government, it should think carefully about how that type of expense is perceived throughout the public sector.

16:27

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** The core of this debate has been whether Scotland's public services can be retained or developed without reducing staff—because staff are the budget. All Governments face that challenge. The SNP policy

with which Mr Crawford began his speech was that there will be no redundancies. Michael Matheson made it clear that that position had to be retained. Mr Crawford went on to attack the record of my party. He claimed that, in previous years, 8,000 extra staff were brought in with new bodies. His Government's policy is that not one redundancy will be made out of those 8,000 staff—they will all be retained. That is one of many inconsistencies in the arguments that Mr Crawford made.

If Mr Swinney is to achieve the £2 billion of efficiency savings with no job losses, public services must either change or be cut, as Tom McCabe said. That is the challenge, and the reality, that the Government will face over the next four years.

The most striking aspect of the local government settlement is that, in 2008-09, cuts are now a reality. That is not scaremongering by any individual councillor or group throughout Scotland; it is the reality that has been presented to MSPs of all political parties. That is why Brian Adam and other SNP members joined Nicol Stephen and members of other parties in meeting the cabinet secretary last week to discuss the situation in Aberdeen.

**John Swinney:** Before Mr Scott completes his remarks about Aberdeen City Council, will he reflect on the issues that I raised at that meeting and in my letter to his party leader? The issues that are being confronted by Aberdeen City Council have grown up over a period of at least five years, during which the council has been living beyond its means. Therefore, they are nothing to do with this Government's local government settlement.

**Tavish Scott:** I will wait to see what comes out of the Audit Scotland inquiry into those matters. I am sure that Mr Swinney would expect me to rest on that independent body's independent advice to the Government and the Parliament in that regard. Members of all political persuasions will be interested to see that advice.

COSLA's assessment—not mine—is that the next two financial years will be very tight. In the context of Mr McCabe's remarks, it strikes me that the cabinet secretary and his colleagues in ministerial office cannot avoid—although they might try—the reality of what will happen over the next three years because of the choices that are being made at local level. People will recognise what those choices mean for their local services and link that to the settlements that the councils have received.

I understand and sympathise with the principles that Mr McCabe set out, and I recognise his consistency on this point. If I remember correctly,

Mr Swinney—I am sure that he will correct me if I am wrong—made clear during his summer tour of local authorities last year that there would be no reform of local government. In that case, we will retain 32 heads of human resources, planning, social care and all the other areas that Mr McCabe described. Mr McCabe knows that to change that would be unpopular. Local government would, understandably, make representations about the nature of local democracy if the Government started to consider boundary changes and structural changes throughout Scotland.

**Bruce Crawford rose—**

**Tavish Scott:** I will just finish this point, as I am trying to develop a point in response to the one that Mr McCabe fairly posed to the chamber.

My contention is that, although Mr McCabe, or indeed the Parliament, might expect the Government to take unpopular decisions in that area, there is not much evidence to suggest that that will happen this year or in any of the next four years.

I am happy to give way to Mr Crawford on the point about unpopularity.

**Bruce Crawford:** The member will know all about unpopularity when he sees his party's position in the polls right now—that is for sure.

As far as the issue of having 32 directors of human resources or directors of finance is concerned, is there any need to retain that number when they can share services, work together and combine a lot more effectively?

**Tavish Scott:** I would have a lot more respect for Mr Crawford's position if he had outlined such thoughts in his opening speech, rather than delivering a petty, ill-informed rant attacking all the other parties. Not one of those ideas was in his speech. If he had made that point, I would have agreed with him; it is a good point for us to think about. If he had been thoughtful in preparing his speech, instead of using the usual political tactics, we would deal with him with considerably more respect.

I turn to what Willie Coffey said on outcome agreements. He made a serious point that we would do well to reflect on. He said—I hope I quote him correctly—that outcome agreements were “hard to measure”; I agree with him on that but, as he knows, his Government is introducing 32 of those outcome agreements across local government. I am not sure that we have any of those agreements yet—Parliament has not had an opportunity to scrutinise them. Could the cabinet secretary tell us when we will have them, as Parliament has a responsibility to examine them to ensure that they are right?

Mr Crawford said in regard to his record that it was all about abolition, and that everything was going well. My colleague Robert Brown made the point about £25 million being spent on creating more bodies. If it is all about abolition, why is he abolishing the fire service inspectorate but replacing it with a fire and rescue service advisory unit? Why is he abolishing the Scottish Building Standards Agency but replacing it with a new directorate for the built environment? Why is he merging the Rowett Research Institute with the University of Aberdeen but creating a new institute of nutrition and health? There is plenty about the record that we will be happy to reflect on over the next four years.

16:33

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** The motion is relatively inoffensive. Indeed, one part of it verges on the fluffy. All members want to see better public services. We all agree that reductions in duplication, bureaucracy and overlaps are a good idea and that having a degree of focus and alignment is positive. I am grateful to Mr Crawford for outlining some of the progress that has been made since January, but he dedicated only about one minute of an eight-minute speech to it. I would be grateful if, in his longer summing-up speech, the cabinet secretary could address that matter and tell us a little more about what will happen during the next couple of months. It is important that we have that information.

The Conservatives' amendment highlights two things. First, talking about effective public services is not an event but a continual process. We must consider the matter all the time so that we get better every year. Secondly, we should not do what previous Administrations did and focus on inputs. It is important to consider end results rather than simply what we put in.

We broadly support the Government's attempts to produce more effective public services, but we are not yet convinced about a couple of aspects. First, what genuine savings will the Scottish taxpayer gain from the exercise? A couple of figures have been bandied about, but in the grand scheme of things they are not hugely significant. It does not appear that they will allow a huge amount of money to be ploughed into front-line services. Perhaps the Government will tell us more about the genuine savings that we can expect and how we can make greater savings, year on year, for the Scottish taxpayer.

Secondly, we need a greater commitment on the head count in the public sector in Scotland. I note that it increased from about 444,000 in 1999 to about 488,000 in 2007. If the changes to the so-called cluttered landscape are to be effective and meaningful, they must result in savings for the

taxpayer. Ultimately, that means reducing the size of the public sector. If we do not do that, the 26 per cent reduction in the number of public bodies will be much less significant.

A point about whether we have something to fear from losing public sector jobs was well made by Margo MacDonald—and extremely well answered by Tom McCabe. Perhaps there is something to fear, but if we create a more dynamic, more mobile and fresher economy, we will have much greater economic growth as a whole. We should take that approach rather than have the stagnation that we have had for the past eight years or so.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Margo MacDonald:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gavin Brown:** I heard Jeremy Purvis first, so I give way to him.

**Jeremy Purvis:** I am grateful. The member mentioned the increase in the number of public sector jobs. He will be aware that the vast majority of the increase is due to employees in the prison service being counted as part of the public sector. Does he believe that there should be more or fewer people in the prison service?

**Gavin Brown:** The 44,000 increase is not purely in the prison service. Mr Purvis has fallen into the age-old trap of being wrong on that score. The prison service merits an entire debate rather than just the snippet or soundbite that Mr Purvis is looking for. I understand that the Liberal Democrats are a little unhappy this week, given their shockingly bad results in last week's council elections, but they were extremely happy—

**Tavish Scott:** Gains!

**Gavin Brown:** Well, I notice that the Liberal Democrats smashed Plaid Cymru into fourth place, gaining two more council seats than Plaid Cymru, even though Plaid Cymru did not contest one seat across the whole of England. At least the London mayoral election result means that we have one more police officer back on the beat.

We are not sure whether the Government is ambitious enough or whether its proposals will be effective. Opinion varies on the percentage of gross domestic product that the public sector represents. Reform Scotland said recently that it is 55 per cent, the Fraser of Allander institute said that it is 52 per cent, and the economic "Pocket Databank" from the office of the chief economic adviser said that it is 51 per cent. However, that databank no longer publishes the figure. As of July last year, it has been removed. If we are to consider the matter seriously, the figure must go back in.

We need to reduce the size of the public sector so that we can increase competitiveness and allow the economy to grow. We all want public services to be more effective, but questions remain about where the Government is going, and we need answers. Ultimately, we need to monitor progress. I note that June 2008 is the first date for monitoring, but perhaps the cabinet secretary will let us know how we are doing so far.

16:39

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** It is traditional to say that the debate has been interesting. That might slightly overstate the case, but it has certainly been a debate with different views. We and the Tories agreed only once all afternoon, when Alex Johnstone agreed with Michael McMahon that the SNP's motion is unambitious. Perhaps that is why we have heard from SNP members a fair bit of repetition of the same dubious claims of progress.

I exclude two SNP members from that statement. Michael Matheson talked about the need for culture change to improve public services—for more openness, transparency and engagement, instead of public bodies thinking that they can do what they want and ignore the consequences. I agree with that important point. However, I also agree with Charlie Gordon that the Scottish Government has failed to show those qualities: not only has it reduced the budget detail that is available to the Parliament and refused requests for more information, it has—as Robert Brown said—taken many decisions first and consulted after. The latest example of that is the extension of the ScotRail franchise well before it had to be done, without any consultation such as that on the original letting of the franchise.

Mr Don talked about how to improve front-line services for their users. He mentioned the in control system. That is an important and powerful concept in care that—as he said—builds on direct payments, which are not available widely enough in any case. Such moves should be supported.

The rest probably spent too much time arguing about how many quangos there are or are not, so I will carry on with that. Many members talked about the SNP's pledge to cut the number of quangos by 40 per cent, on which the SNP has claimed great progress, but not all of that progress bears examination. In several cases, the suspicion remains that two or more quangos have simply been merged and that they retain all their functions and costs. That might reduce quango names, but it hardly qualifies as streamlining. Derek Brownlee and other Tories have made that point eloquently in the past, but they did not get round to it today. I presume that that is because, once again, they held us to account and let the

Government off the hook. Gavin Brown was in the final minute of summing up before he mentioned the SNP Government. The Tories really miss the point.

As several members have said, in the past year, the Government has established, by our last count, 39 all-new consultative committees, groups, councils and other bodies. Mr Crawford seems to believe that giving those organisations a different name means that they do not count, which is a pretty strange way to operate. That is not an example of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing. It was claimed that reorganising the enterprise network cut 21 local enterprise companies, but they have been replaced by 48 new national, regional and sub-regional organisations. I acknowledge the help of Tavish Scott in calculating that; he has pointed that out several times. That arrangement is not as streamlined as it was presented to be. As Jeremy Purvis eloquently showed, the system in the Borders is not more effective either, and other, similar, examples exist.

No one could argue with the principle of the Government's seeking greater focus on the outcomes that it wishes to achieve, but we are entitled to consider the effectiveness of its progress, which is central to the premise. Only yesterday, Mr Mather said in the chamber that he was told—in Canada, I think—that

"Cash may be king, but focus is queen."—[*Official Report*, 7 May 2008; c 8332.]

That is another inspiring slogan to go above the ministerial desk, but I fear that there is still no space on any ministerial desk for Truman's famous plaque that said, "The buck stops here." More of that later.

The Government's key instrument of focus is the national performance framework, in which we find five strategic objectives, one purpose, seven purpose targets, 15 national outcomes, 45 national indicators and targets and 11 local government spending priorities. On top of that we are promised 32 single outcome agreements.

Tavish Scott is right: we have hankered after a sighting of a single outcome agreement for a long time. After all, we signed off £11 billion on the promise of those agreements. I have before me the City of Edinburgh Council's single outcome agreement, which runs to 62 pages. If every council is equally assiduous, we can expect about 2,000 pages of single outcome agreements. After the famine will come the feast; we can be pretty sure that this is not really streamlining.

The motion mentions not only focus but alignment. It is certainly the case that there is not much point in having outcomes to aim for if efforts are not aligned with them. The inescapable fact is

that investment is a major element of those efforts. The Tory amendment tries to bodyswerve that, but although its words are innocuous Derek Brownlee rather gave the game away when he claimed that councils have been overfunded. The amendment may be innocuous but it hides a harsher analysis that we will not support.

The City of Edinburgh Council agrees with my point about investment: the common theme that runs through its single outcome agreement is the lack of finance available to achieve the outcomes.

**Margo MacDonald:** Will the member give way?

**Iain Gray:** I am sorry, but I am struggling for time.

A particularly interesting example is:

“Class Size 18—additional funding for both accommodation ( ... £16m) and teachers ( ... £7.45m) is required to address the financial implications of meeting the national outcome.”

That is a national outcome with no money to deliver it. The truth is that only the rhetoric of this Government is aligned with its outcomes—resources are not. That applies not only to local government, but across the piece.

We know, and we have heard, how some savings will be achieved. They will be achieved through measures such as those described by Mr Purvis. His experience mirrors mine in East Lothian, where headteachers are struggling to find savings in next year's budget and many are proposing teacher reductions, bigger classes and more compositing. East Lothian parents are pretty clear that their education service will be reduced. That is not an efficiency saving; it is a cut. There are two defences. One is the Lord Nelson defence, which was used by the Deputy First Minister last week when she put the telescope to her blind eye and said, “I see no cuts—they are not happening.” The other is the Pontius Pilate defence, when hands are washed and we are told that it is a matter for councils and is nothing to do with the Government. Mr Crawford came up with a new one today—the Dr Who defence. Whenever a cut is found, they get in the TARDIS and go back through space and time until they find a Labour Administration that they can blame it on, no matter how long ago that was.

I mentioned the plaque on Truman's desk that stated, “The buck stops here.” The other side, which faced Truman, said:

“I'm from Missouri—show me.”

That must be this Parliament's approach to the Government's claims of effectiveness in public services: it has to show us, not just tell us.

16:48

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Iain Gray rather unfairly poked fun at the suggestion that this has been an interesting debate. I have found it interesting—which perhaps tells members a lot about how I spend my time these days—and informative.

I will address some of the issues that have been raised by members. Michael Matheson made an important point about the requirement for the whole process of the delivery of public services to be addressed within a framework of changing the culture of public service organisations.

Mr McCabe—to whose remarks I will come back later—reinforced the point about the importance of realising that public services exist to serve those who consume them rather than those who provide them. That point is sometimes missed when we consider delivery of public services, but it is one that we should always remember. I say to Mr Gray that the appropriate plaque for all public servants to have on their desks might state that they are there “to ensure that we deliver quality public services to members of the public.”

Mr Matheson mentioned problems that have been encountered by the bakery industry in connection with engagement with it on food service training. I will investigate the matter and reply to him, because it merits serious consideration.

In Michael McMahon's contribution on outcomes, he remarked that what matters is what people get from public services. I could not agree more. He then went on to criticise the Government's shift to focus on outcomes. I will focus on Mr McMahon's criticism of the Government's performance framework in which we have an outcome of increasing the proportion of adults who make one or more visits to the outdoors every week. We could have said that the measure of progress will be the number of footpaths that the Government creates through woodland areas, but that would not tell us whether people are exercising, as our outcome indicator is designed to do in order to demonstrate that we are changing people's behaviour so that they live healthier lives. Willie Coffey's contribution was much more thoughtful—it acknowledged that we must change the emphasis from inputs to outcomes so that we know what we are achieving on behalf of individuals in our society.

The focus on outcomes has been criticised in this debate and on other occasions. One of the criticisms is that the Government has delivered the change in focus at an accelerated pace, but we have implemented it quickly to ensure that we make progress. I make no apology for accelerating

the pace of change—there has been persistent dithering on the issue for many years.

Last night, I spoke at a public sector event at the University of Stirling that was attended by many public servants who have managerial and operational responsibilities for delivery of our public services. Every one of them said to me that they appreciate and welcome the Government's shift to outcomes because it liberates them to design services that meet needs. Certainly, however, they are having to do that quickly and in a fashion that meets the expectations of the public.

**Margo MacDonald:** Talking of outcomes, there is agreement that the Government is tackling the issue in a new and fresh way. However, we must not forget that resources are required to service those outcomes successfully. I have not heard much about the alleged shortfall in resources that the Government might have expected and, perhaps, did expect when it drew up its proposed outcomes.

**John Swinney:** As Margo MacDonald will understand from the budget process that we went through some months ago, the financial settlement means that the Scottish Government has received the lowest increase in its budget since devolution. We are clearly operating in a much more constrained financial situation, while there have been increases in the demands on public services and changes in demography into the bargain, as Mr McCabe said. Resources are constrained because we live within the financial framework that was established by the United Kingdom Government.

There are other questions—for example, on the lack of payment of Barnett consequentials for expenditure on the regeneration elements of the Olympic games, and for expenditure on the Carter review of prisons provision in England, for which there is direct comparability in Scotland. Those are significant issues that mean that we have not had at our disposal the resources to invest in the fashion that we would like.

My final point about the outcomes approach relates to a point that Mr Purvis made about the way in which organisations have historically come together in the Borders to work effectively. I have read the single outcome agreement that has been proposed by Scottish Borders Council, except that it was not actually proposed by the council. It was proposed in an imaginative fashion by a collection of organisations in the Borders that are working together to focus on translating the Borders contribution to the national outcomes that the Government seeks. That is a desirable approach and I compliment Scottish Borders Council on its submission. It was a very interesting read.

**Jeremy Purvis:** I, too, have read that single outcome agreement. The cabinet secretary will have noticed that there is nothing in it about the class sizes promise. Scottish Borders Council and some other partners have said that there is no funding to deliver it. Did the cabinet secretary notice that there is nothing on class sizes in that single outcome agreement?

**John Swinney:** Again, Mr Purvis displays the truly miserable approach that he takes in all such debates. Quite clearly, discussions are going on between the Government and local government about implementation of the commitments in the concordat. That is the right and proper place for that discussion to take place if we are to realise the year-on-year reductions in class sizes that the concordat talks about. If Mr Purvis were more generous, he would look at the substance of the single outcome agreement, rather than criticise it as he does.

**Jeremy Purvis** Will the member give way?

**John Swinney:** No—I have given way already.

On the point that Mr Johnstone raised, one of the visions of this Government is to ensure that, as part of the outcomes approach, we focus public bodies' efforts towards working with local government, the third sector and the private sector in order to deliver shared outcomes as part of the Government's overall approach.

I want to spend some time talking about Mr McCabe's speech. Mr McCabe knows that I wish him no ill, so I hope that he understands that I do not want to destroy his prospects for the future with what I am about to say. Not for the first time, Mr McCabe made one of the most thoughtful contributions to a debate when he set out some of the challenges that the Government has to address in relation to public service provision. I say gently, however, that it would have had more substance had it come from his party's front bench.

Mr McCabe talked about the experience of public servants who are trying their best to deliver public services, but are presented with a difficult and challenging task because of the obstacles, barriers and impediments that bureaucracy and certain organisational arrangements have put in place and which prevent them from achieving what they want to achieve. He also made the fair point that the protectionism of senior managers in public services has been an obstacle to development. That is also something that the Government is not prepared to tolerate. I assure Mr McCabe that the Government is prepared to confront that culture of protectionism within senior management.

On that point, one of the arguments that Tavish Scott marshalled was that unless we undertake local government reorganisation, we cannot

simplify and clarify the structures of management in local authorities. That is a totally inappropriate black-and-white view of the world. We have to ensure that we create a culture in our public organisations in which senior management and the elected leadership of local authorities work to make it easier for public servants to deliver our public services through simpler structures. That does not require the cumbersome process of local government reorganisation.

My final remark—it applies to many other member's speeches—about Mr McCabe's speech is that this Government must of course be judged by its results. That is why the Government is putting in place mechanisms for judging our performance in delivering our efficient government programme, and why we are putting in place the measures that are designed to assess how the Government has progressed in relation to the national performance framework. We will report openly to Parliament on those.

Gavin Brown raised the issue of single outcome agreements. The Government is in discussion with local authorities on the contents of those single outcome agreements, which will be finalised by June. Obviously, Parliament will be able to express its view on them.

The Government has made formidable progress in addressing the agenda of reducing the number of public organisations—the process of simplification is advancing week by week and we will be delighted to report to Parliament on our progress. That is part of this Government's agenda to ensure that we align all elements of our public services to a simple and efficient approach that is focused on supporting the Government's purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. We have started with an imaginative pace of activity, and we will be judged on the results that we deliver.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** I must reluctantly suspend for half a minute, until decision time at 5 o'clock.

16:59

*Meeting suspended.*

17:00

*On resuming—*

## Decision Time

### **The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):**

There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-1848.2, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1848, in the name of Johann Lamont, on meeting Scotland's housing needs, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### **For**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**AGAINST**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)

Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

**ABSTENTIONS**

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 48, Against 75, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S3M-1848.1, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1848, in the name of Johann Lamont, on meeting Scotland's housing needs, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 74, Against 46, Abstentions 3.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S3M-1848.3, in the name of Jim Tolson, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1848, in the name of Johann Lamont, on meeting Scotland's housing needs, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 74, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that motion S3M-1848, in the name of Johann Lamont, on meeting Scotland's housing needs, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)

Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 74, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament recognises the broad range of issues that must be tackled in meeting the diverse housing needs of people across Scotland; confirms that the Scottish Government must act to address these issues, including continued work to prevent and reduce homelessness, the further development of housing to meet particular and specialist need, dealing with the blockages to the supply of housing, providing affordable housing to buy and within the socially rented sector, ensuring higher quality and better managed housing for rent in the private sector, seeking solutions to the problems facing local authorities where tenants voted against stock transfer and recognising the distinctive challenges in rural areas, regeneration areas and areas of high demand; notes that the consultation responses to the *Firm Foundations* document exposed significant flaws in the Scottish Government's approach; urges the Scottish Government to address these flaws and bring forward a coherent strategy for all of Scotland's housing needs and, in particular, agrees that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing should ensure that the Mazars report into second stage transfer issues in Glasgow Housing Association is subject to open, transparent and independent scrutiny; regrets the failure of the Scottish Government to actively promote housing stock transfer by local authorities to community-based housing associations, with the approval of tenants; urges the Scottish Government to co-operate with HM Treasury and councils to achieve the substantial debt write-offs of over £2 billion which are available and thereby facilitate new investment in social housing; regrets that after two parliamentary debates on the subject since the budget was passed, the Scottish Government has still failed to come forward with clear figures on its housing plans across all sector and tenure types including the number of affordable rented houses to be built from 2008 to 2011, and has further failed to produce a clear trajectory for how it intends to meet its commitment to abolish unintentional homelessness by 2012; calls for improved energy efficiency to be a key objective in plans for new housing, and opposes the Scottish Government's proposals for large scale procurement put forward in *Firm Foundations*.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that amendment S3M-1849.2, in the name of Andy Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1849, in

the name of Bruce Crawford, on effective public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

**AGAINST**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 45, Against 64, Abstentions 16.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S3M-1849.1, in the name of Derek Brownlee, seeking to amend motion S3M-1849, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on effective public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)

Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)

Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 63, Against 46, Abstentions 16.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that amendment S3M-1849.3, in the name of Robert Brown, seeking to amend motion S3M-1849, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on effective public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)

Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 60, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S3M-1849, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on effective public services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 63, Against 60, Abstentions 2.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament welcomes the opportunity to debate proposals to deliver better public services by reducing duplication, bureaucracy and overlaps in the public sector with the aim of achieving greater focus and alignment with the Purpose of Government and the outcomes set out in the national performance framework; believes that there is scope for continuous improvement in the design and delivery of public services, and rejects the notion that improvements in public services can only be achieved by increased levels of public spending.

## Right to Read Campaign

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1651, in the name of Alison McInnes, on RNIB Scotland's right to read campaign.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the Right to Read campaign by RNIB Scotland for equal access to textbooks and other educational material for blind and visually impaired children; notes the excellent example of schools such as Craigiebarns Primary School in Dundee in ensuring that blind and visually impaired children are included in mainstream schooling; believes that a national transcription service should be established, building on the work done by RNIB, other organisations and local councils; acknowledges that such a service could also be of use to other children with additional support needs, and so believes that prompt action is needed to move forward with this agenda.

17:10

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** This is the first time that I have had a motion selected for a members' business debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the matter and I thank all the members who supported my motion.

A couple of months ago, I attended a fringe meeting at a party conference. I do not know about other members' experience but, for me, fringe meetings, although undoubtedly enjoyable and informative, do not always spur me to action. However, I left that one determined to do what I could to highlight a problem. I was particularly inspired by George McLaughlin, a young man who spoke at the meeting. George has been blind since birth because of retinopathy. He shared his experiences of being at Uddingston grammar school, which has a special resource unit for pupils with a visual impairment. He was in no doubt about the value of accessible study materials or that they had allowed him to keep up with his sighted peers. He praised his school for the way in which it made his learning inclusive.

George was followed by a speaker from RNIB Scotland who described an alternative experience. We heard about pupils waiting months for text books to be transcribed into a readable format; students' computers and equipment breaking down and not being replaced for weeks; a lack of absence cover for specialist staff; and young people studying for exams without access to past papers or study aids. I was shocked. As about 80 per cent of our learning is visual, it is not difficult to imagine how disruptive and frustrating it would be to have only limited access to study materials. Through discussions with teachers and specialist support staff, I have learned that an individual's understanding and acceptance of their visual

impairment is vital to educational progress, as is developing self-image and confidence. However, progress can easily be hindered by a lack of resources, and anything that singles out a pupil as different can undermine their confidence. Good resources minimise the frustration of the impairment.

In my region, Craigiebarns primary school in Dundee has been praised for its highly inclusive approach to supporting pupils with visual impairment—I am looking forward to visiting it soon. The school provides a child-led learning experience with a whole-school policy that supports visually impaired people's right to be treated equally. Unfortunately, local authorities in Scotland vary in their approach to and success in producing accessible curriculum materials. In some areas, provision is excellent and of a high standard but, in others, services are not as well developed.

It is estimated that a pupil will require about 375 educational textbooks in primary school and 750 in secondary school, and that is not counting recreational reading. To transcribe those textbooks is an enormous task for authorities to undertake, which perhaps explains why the picture throughout Scotland is patchy. As a result, in some areas, blind or partially sighted children often have to wait months for materials and, in some cases, the material never arrives. That severely inhibits their ability to learn and further reduces their life opportunities.

I understand the problems facing local authorities. It can take hours to produce a Braille version of something that might take only 15 minutes to teach. When pupils study for higher, it can take all the time of support staff and more to prepare material for them. Aberdeen City Council, in explaining the matter to me, stated:

"When the student was taking standard grades the volume of work that had to be adapted and the timescales within which we had to work meant that a significant amount of the work was adapted by the (specialist) teacher in her own time".

RNIB's campaign for the establishment of a national transcription service to co-ordinate the provision of learning materials in alternative forms to all blind and partially sighted school pupils offers a cost-effective solution to the problem. A national service would help to address inequalities and provide consistency in the quality, timescales and choice of provision, as well as freeing up teaching time. Most important, it would bring about a step change in those young people's experience of school. For some authorities, the number of blind and partially sighted pupils who require alternative formats is so small that it is not economically viable to provide the service. It would surely be more cost effective and efficient to

produce those centrally. If materials are already adapted and held electronically, little time or effort is required to provide additional copies, whether they are in Braille, large print or DAISY—digital accessible information system—format.

Ideally, the national transcription service would also hold a stock of equipment for use by blind and partially sighted pupils. In that way, if a child's equipment broke down, a replacement could be available immediately.

I have written to all four councils in my area, and all of them would welcome a transcription service. I would like to quote a couple of comments. Aberdeen City Council said:

"Time scales are crucial and work has to be individualised to suit the student. Maths and science work is particularly difficult and time consuming. If there were a bank of materials made available this would considerably reduce workload and stress and free up valuable teacher time which could be spent in the class room."

Aberdeenshire Council commented that

"a national transcription service would be supported by our sensory support service as current practice is dependent on networking at meetings and conferences, informal discussions and extensive research by our vision support teachers. As visual impairment is a low incidence disability a national resource would ensure improved curricular access for all blind and partially sighted pupils across Scotland."

Currently, more than 75 per cent of blind and partially sighted adults in Scotland are unemployed. Recent research indicates that almost 1,100 pupils across Scotland are blind or partially sighted, so let us make sure that they do not face the same prospect. The best way to equip young Scots with employment opportunities is through education and skills training. However, the opportunities will be extremely limited for visually impaired Scottish children if they cannot access curriculum materials.

The right to learn is a principle that is woven into our society. Where there is concern that visually impaired schoolchildren are not getting materials in time, or in the format that they need, Parliament has a duty to examine the issue and offer solutions.

My solution, and the RNIB's solution, is the establishment of a national educational transcription service. Such a service is overdue. Each year's delay means scores of young people not being able to reach their full potential.

I hope that tonight's debate will demonstrate cross-party support for taking a fresh look at this problem; I hope, too, that the Minister for Children and Early Years is able to give his support in principle and that he will agree to work with stakeholders to make the service a reality.

17:17

**Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I thank Alison McInnes for bringing this important members' business debate to the Parliament, and I congratulate her on securing what is her first members' business debate.

I have been involved with RNIB Scotland since becoming an MSP. In my capacity as deputy convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on visual impairment, I have spoken with the organisation at length. I was also in contact with RNIB Scotland quite a few times in my previous capacity, before being elected to Parliament.

The right to read campaign has rightly gained support from all quarters, and I was privileged to chair, on behalf of RNIB Scotland, a successful fringe meeting on the campaign at the recent Scottish National Party spring conference. George McLaughlin was one of the guest speakers at that meeting, and I must agree with what Alison McInnes said. George is a very impressive and intelligent young man.

I was delighted that the Minister for Schools and Skills was able to attend that fringe meeting and answer people's questions about RNIB Scotland's campaign. I was also delighted that she agreed to meet RNIB Scotland to discuss the campaign and other relevant issues further.

As we have heard, the campaign seeks to create a national educational transcription service to enable blind and partially sighted children to have access to the learning aids that they require. Children can find school days tough enough without being at a distinct disadvantage due to a lack of adequate materials. That is especially true for someone with a disability.

Research by RNIB Scotland shows that almost 1,400 pupils across Scotland require specialist learning materials. Research also shows some discrepancies among local authorities, which are responsible for the provision of such materials. As can be expected, some areas of the country are better equipped than others. RNIB Scotland has stated that the current system lacks a cohesive national strategy and that many of the materials used in schools around Scotland could be introduced in others. Although local authorities should still be encouraged to take responsibility for provision and distribution in their area, a centralised system would still be appropriate. I therefore support any initiative to introduce a centralised system for use throughout the country, to enable blind and partially sighted children to have access to electronic copies of the textbooks that they require.

One of the key issues that RNIB Scotland has highlighted to me is that, although reformatted

textbooks are occasionally available, the time delay in getting them is detrimental to the people who are in need of such assistance. As suggested by RNIB Scotland, if access to textbooks was delayed for sighted children, the issue would be highlighted more prominently.

RNIB Scotland also states that publishers have already shown interest in supporting such an initiative. That news should be welcomed. Indeed, at last summer's Edinburgh book festival, Robert Brown and I attended the launch of a multi-format text book.

The foundations of this positive move are definitely in place: specialists and publishers are on board and there is widespread public support. I have no doubt that we can provide a national education transcription service and that, with the correct input from organisations such as RNIB Scotland and experienced individuals, we are not too far away from implementing it across Scotland.

More than 75 per cent of blind and partially sighted adults in Scotland are unemployed, often because of a lack of skills and training. That can obviously be traced back to the lack of learning materials. We must uphold the fact that education is a right not a privilege, no matter whether a person is fully sighted or otherwise.

This debate has been worth while and important, and I am sure that there will continue to be cross-party support on the issue.

17:21

**Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the debate. It shows that there is an interest across the Parliament in the right to read campaign, the aim of which is for everyone to be able to read the same book at the same time and at the same price.

I am particularly pleased that the motion singles out Craigiebarns primary school in Dundee, which I used to visit regularly as it was one of the feeder primaries for the school at which I worked. Indeed, I still keep in touch with it and am very aware of the excellent work that has gone on there for years and still goes on.

All children must have access to books not only to feed their imagination but to give them essential knowledge about our world. Primary and secondary school pupils need a range of curriculum materials; it is, as Alison McInnes made clear, a long list and includes fiction, text books, work books, work sheets, assessment materials and examination papers.

The books for all project, which began in June 2006, picked up on the Labour-led Administration's excellent work. Labour is

committed to literacy for all and to promoting the right to read, and we feel that there is a need not only to co-ordinate all the good work that is being done in schools throughout the country but to ensure that it is properly funded.

I have often thought that the services of speaking books for the visually impaired should have been rolled out to people who could not access text, and I am delighted that such connections have been made in the right to read campaign. Given that everyone will benefit, it is essential that the Government responds to this issue and I look forward to hearing the minister's ideas on how we can end the book famine that 3 million people in the United Kingdom still face.

Huge improvements in technology have made it easier to access books. For example, parents can let their children listen to books on tapes and CDs. Indeed, such a method is open to everyone, whether they have a visual impairment—which, after all, can affect the old as well as the young—or whether they have a difficulty such as dyslexia or another learning disability. Such tools are widely available commercially and libraries throughout Scotland are well stocked with them.

I draw the chamber's attention to the inquiry into disability that the Equal Opportunities Committee in the previous session undertook. The committee's report was published simultaneously in accessible format, which is an excellent example of how the right to read can be taken seriously and a very practical demonstration of how the Parliament can lead on such issues.

Moreover, the debate's web page contains the very important information that the Parliament is committed to engaging with all the people of Scotland. In line with that aim, our information is available in a range of accessible formats and languages to assist everyone in engaging equally with the Parliament.

We must also act on the RNIB Scotland report "Make it Count—Election experience of people with sight loss", which examines institute members' voting experience at last year's Scottish elections. The right to read must extend to the right to read ballot papers and voting instructions, to ensure that everyone can take a proper part in the democratic process.

In 2006, the Labour-led Administration funded a symposium on accessible digital curriculum resources. Now that a year has passed, I call on the Government to work with stakeholders to organise a similar event to discuss the findings of the working group on the "Books for All: Accessible curriculum materials for pupils with additional support needs" report. I also wholeheartedly support the call for a national transcription service.

17:24

**Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):** We welcome tonight's motion, and I happily congratulate Alison McInnes on lodging it and on the engaging way in which she opened the debate.

The debate follows on quite naturally from last evening's debate on alternative and augmentative communication and it highlights once more a difficulty that is experienced by a minority in our community—in this case, blind and partially sighted children. Their difficulty is quite literally out of sight and out of mind of the vast majority of us. As was the case with the debate on alternative and augmentative communication and that on the concerns of wheelchair users, which you recently brought to Parliament, Presiding Officer—I am delighted to use the word "you" in the appropriate context—we are discussing a matter that, if properly and more widely understood, would without question result in a demand for action by the majority. The Scottish Conservatives offer their support for the action that is encapsulated in the RNIB's campaign.

For children who are blind or partially sighted, the ability to read is just as profound a need as the ability to be mobile is to those who require an appropriate wheelchair or as the ability to communicate is to those who are denied the usual powers of speech. The campaign seeks to address that need not by hoarding some pressure group theory but by inviting the Government to learn from the experience of many other communities in Europe and America, where centrally provided funding ensures equal access to nationally based resources. That is the obvious route to address the geographical dispersion of a minority requirement.

It is not enough to offer warm words but then to abdicate responsibility for delivery to councils. In any event, sufficient expertise does not exist to enable every council to replicate the effort that is required, so we support the campaign for the establishment of a national transcription service on which schools, teachers and pupils can rely and call.

Initial capital funding is sought; subsequent operational costs will be met through council subscription to the services that are offered. Alison McInnes and Stuart McMillan detailed the various benefits that that will bring to all. Once again, it is possible, for a relatively small commitment and investment, to transform the lives of a disadvantaged minority who, as a result, will be capable of achieving life-altering outcomes. What is required is willingness and the will. Today we can be unanimous in offering our support to the demand for progress.

I will briefly consider the role of spoken word, of which I have always been an advocate and admirer. The quality and range of material that is now available in spoken word format is extraordinarily diverse. It was originally conceived as a useful tool for the blind and partially sighted. The breadth of material that is available is sustained by wider public demand. Even for children who can read, the enjoyment that spoken word can bring can introduce them to the joys of speech rhythm and accent, the thrill and drama of expression and the context of the wider use of vocabulary and nuance.

I hope that members will not think it rather sad or, indeed, pathetic if I confess that Mrs Carlaw and I often nod off in bed to the BBC radio collection—to pristine recordings of Francis Durbridge's Paul Temple serials, some of which are now half a century old, the organisation's extensive Agatha Christie adaptations or its unique Sherlock Holmes collection, all the stories in which are performed by the same lead cast throughout. We try anything once, although we have found it impossible to warm to the inescapably dreary and ludicrous "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency".

Rather than give the impression that I have painted a comprehensive portrait of our private life, I want to advertise the wider benefits and enjoyments of spoken word, which can be experienced on CD, download and radio. I also wish to emphasise the particular interest that the format can have for children, who are now almost entirely denied any spoken word service on radio, except as an annual seasonal event. Spoken word can engage the imagination and bring to life text. The BBC, in particular, has an extensive and inspiring catalogue of readings and dramatisations.

My speech might be uncharacteristically brief, but it is heartfelt. We support the aims of the RNIB's campaign and congratulate Alison McInnes on her motion.

17:28

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I welcome the debate and congratulate Alison McInnes on securing it and on the content and manner of her speech. As it happens, I can claim some credit for her securing the debate because I chaired the party conference meeting to which she referred, just as Stuart McMillan chaired a meeting on the subject at a Scottish National Party conference.

I have an interest in the issue not just as the chair of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on visual impairment, but as Adam Ingram's predecessor as Deputy Minister for Education and Young People. In that capacity, I

took forward work on the DAISY technology with the aims of the RNIB's campaign very much in mind and became increasingly convinced that that was the way forward.

I will provide some perspective on the subject, which Adam Ingram might comment on further when he sums up. What do we have in mind? We are talking about alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, audio and interactive access. How can such material be obtained from a central point, through information technology connections or whatever? That was the importance of the DAISY work, which the RNIB developed; it could translate content into different formats and make it useful in different ways. It should be one of the big advantages of this modern technological age—I am a technophobe in these matters—that it should be possible to make the same documentation available in different formats at the press of a button. The issue is how we join such a degree of technological possibility with the resource that is made available by different councils, the RNIB and others to make it effective and immediately available to the people who need it, not least in the schools that we have been talking about. I will be interested to hear from the minister later what progress has been made in that particular respect.

It is fair to say that a lot of good work has been done already, primarily by the RNIB. I have immense admiration for the RNIB's campaigns in this and other areas. Good work has also been done by other organisations, such as CARROT—Cambuslang and Rutherglen review on tape—in Rutherglen, which supplies audio tapes with local news and other content to visually impaired users. Good work has also been done by schools and education authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, which has made considerable progress in this area.

Part of the issue is sharing all that resource, and part is making it routinely accessible. Part of the challenge, too, is getting useable materials to blind youngsters at the same time as everybody else gets books or course materials. There is also the challenge of sharing with people with other learning needs, as the Scottish Parliament cross-party group on dyslexia has rightly pointed out. There are also those who need alternative and augmentative communication aids, which were the subject of last night's members' business debate, as Jackson Carlaw said. There is also a challenge to the usability of the material across the board by unhelpful copyright and other restrictions.

A centralised system need not mean a centralised place; it is a matter of joining the resources that exist in various places to ensure that they can be shared, accessed and translated down the wires to the people who want to use them. However, after making all those

qualifications, it remains the case that a national transcription service is an objective whose time has come. The RNIB estimates that 1,100 blind or partially sighted children in Scotland regularly experience difficulties in accessing curriculum materials. They are often children who face challenges beyond the norm, and many of them have problems in addition to their sight problems. Young people have a right to read and we must make that right a reality. I hope that the minister can reassure members that that process is moving forward.

Again, I congratulate Alison McInnes on bringing the issue to public attention in a debate that will give it a push.

17:32

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I shall be brief because the arguments have been clearly put to the minister about why we should have a national transcription service and the difference that it could make to the young children concerned. They have the right to the best that we can offer. We have the technology. We heard from Marlyn Glen that we can provide a transcription of live speech immediately. This speech could be appearing in Braille within minutes across the country, if the example from the Equal Opportunities Committee were taken forward.

I am an occasional visitor to the Royal blind school in Edinburgh. I am impressed by the work that is done there, by the dedication of the staff, by the reaction of the young people there and by their confidence in standing up and speaking to people, and engaging in conversation. They had a wonderful project with St George's girls school in which they took turns in presenting a big project on the environment. I could see that those young people want to engage in issues outwith the school. They are outward and forward-looking young people who are the same as young people in the rest of our schools. They deserve the best that we can offer them. I look forward to the minister responding as positively as possible to what he has heard from members during the debate.

Like Mrs Carlaw, Mrs Harper—but not me—goes to her slumbers with headphones on and a suitable book to take her to her rest. I can speak at second hand for the efficacy and joy of that system. I offer my warm congratulations to Alison McInnes for bringing the debate to the chamber. I look forward to the minister's response.

17:35

**The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram):** I will spare members details of my sleeping habits.

I congratulate Alison McInnes on securing a debate on RNIB Scotland's right to read campaign. It is essential that all young people meet their full potential and that schools play their role in that by providing all pupils with accessible curriculum materials. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 specifically places a responsibility on local authorities to identify, meet and keep under review the additional support needs of all young people who may require assistance, including those with visual impairments. Duties are laid on authorities to provide additional support for children under three who are referred to them by a health board. If parents are concerned about the provision that their child is receiving, there are provisions under the 2004 act to enable them to have those concerns addressed.

We are already supporting local authorities to meet their duty to deliver curriculum and school information in alternative forms, where necessary, to enable pupils to achieve their full potential. That is in line with the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002, which requires that all disabled pupils are able to access the curriculum. That includes ensuring that they have access to accessible curriculum materials.

Although I appreciate that the RNIB is calling for a national transcription service for visually impaired and blind pupils, as Robert Brown said, we must not forget that other formats may be more suitable for other groups of children with additional support needs. The scoping exercise, books for all, which was conducted by the CALL centre—for communication aids for language and learning—reported that pupils with visual impairment were well catered for and that a number of other pupils with a print disability would benefit from adapted materials. That work was taken forward by a group of stakeholders that convened on three occasions after the publication of the "Books for All" report to consider its recommendations and the way forward. I am delighted to report to Parliament that the group, which included representation from local authorities, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Dyslexia Scotland and the RNIB, has made considerable progress on achievements.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks in our schools is related to copyright legislation. Until April 2008, the schools copyright licence allowed materials to be adapted only for those with visual or physical impairment. From April, the Copyright Licensing Agency agreed to extend the licence to cover those who are visually impaired or otherwise disabled, which is a much wider definition. That notable achievement for the group will benefit a large number of pupils with a range of needs, including dyslexia. In addition, we have funded the CALL centre to take forward a project that will

enable pupils to listen to digital curriculum materials spoken in a Scottish voice. That material, in a voice provided by Heather the Weather, can be downloaded by all schools free of charge from the CALL centre website.

Finally, the greatest achievement of the group has been the creation of a database of adapted resource for all pupils with additional support needs. The database will be available to all schools through Scran, which is one of the largest educational online services to provide access to educational material. The database will contain a list of adapted materials and a note of where they are held. I refer to Robert Brown's remarks about a centralised system not requiring a centralised place. It is possible to access materials from throughout the country. They can be requested and made available to any pupil in Scotland. Subject to copyright agreement, the database will also hold adapted materials that can be instantly accessed and used.

The Scottish books for all database is being piloted with local authorities that are users of the glow website and by those who were represented on the stakeholder group. Learning and Teaching Scotland commenced the pilot in April and will feed back its findings in June. It is hoped that Scottish books for all will be rolled out at the beginning of the new school year in August.

By accessing those resources and planning appropriately, teachers will be able to ensure that all pupils with additional support needs receive curriculum materials at the same time as their classmates in a format that meets their needs. I am sure that the Parliament and RNIB will agree that that not only meets the concerns that have been raised but goes further.

I acknowledge that RNIB's right to read campaign has been running for a number of years. However, I feel that the measures that I have outlined will have a tremendous impact on pupils' access to education and that the work has been done in a methodical and timely manner. I am grateful to RNIB for raising with us the issue of accessible curriculum materials and I trust that all are reassured that, given the steps that we have taken, there is no need for the type of national transcription service that RNIB proposes. We are totally committed to ensuring that all our pupils can access the curriculum. The "Books for All" report has enabled us to identify gaps in provision and take positive steps to ensure that we can achieve that aim.

*Meeting closed at 17:42.*



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